THE SALE by Joan Conquest

THE SALE

BOOKS BY JOAN CONQUEST

CHASTITY
FORBIDDEN
CRUMBLING WALLS
THE STREET OF MANY ARCHES
THE HAWK OF EGYPT
DESERT LOVE
ZARAH THE CRUEL
LEONIE OF THE JUNGLE

The Sale

by
JOAN
CONQUEST

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To

THE BEST AND MOST LOVED

MOTHER

IN THE WORLD

MINE

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THE SALE

THE CROOKED PATH.

THE TYPHOON.

THE menace added a white cushion, a string of decorative lanterns and the week's periodicals to its spoil.

Like a fat and ancient duck, moulted of tail and wing feathers, the cushion negotiated space to impale itself upon something spiky; out of the wound in its gaping side a myriad feathers, snow-white against the ugly sky, played follow-my-leader to Singapore's furthest confines; the periodicals flapped from the roof-garden like square, bodiless birds; the Japanese lanterns, taking a short cut across the Malay Peninsular's extreme point, drifted merrily out to the China Sea.

Across that tossing water-waste the typhoon, leaving wreckage, death and disaster in its wake, drove upon its path to find its own end either in the middle of the China Sea, further north in the Gulf of Siam or east towards Cambodia.

Janet Grant's cry, urging the young Malay to crouch down against the protective parapet, brought John Grant running.

"Janet! Janet!"

A world of concern in his voice for the bonny young wife who would present him with what they devoutly hoped would be a son in less than nine months now. A

genial fellow, Grant, with a rare fortune out of rubber to his credit. A financial triumph due to the celerity with which he slipped off the crest of the boom to *terra firma* before the wave dissolved, drowning those who had sat astride the watery fence too long. A happy fellow, too, with a successful finger in many a savoury, Eastern, commercial pie.

Janet, barely twenty-two, had loved him these two years after the manner of the good and faithful spouse, electing, when the inevitable 'hot-weather' question cropped up, to stay with him, offering her bonny presence, unfailing good humour and splendid housewifery as substitute for the manifold temptations likely to beset a man left solo in an enervating temperature.

"How foolish of you, dear!" shouted Grant above the roar of the wind and the swish and cracking of the many trees about. "Most unwise. The typhoon may be passing right out to sea but just the lash of its tail can throw a man let alone a woman." Unhooking her from the lantern pole to which she clung he slid her to the ground and sat down beside her whilst the young Malay negotiated the floor towards them on hands and knees. "About how far out's the devil, Sunyi?" He pressed his wife's pretty head against his shoulder and ordered the Malay to sit down. "The native knows the typhoon's latitude by the tone of the wind, don't you, Sunyi?"

The young fellow laughed, nodding his handsome head. The passing of typhoon, bird or thief in the night were just words in an open book to the real Malay, by which he meant those reared on the mainland and far from the

Western civilisation which seemed to be losing its sense of sight, judging by the universal adoption of horn-rimmed glasses, as it had already lost its sense of smell. He touched his eyes. "Here, Master, I can see the monster's path by the flight of the birds and clouds." He indicated his nose. "By this, through the mingled odours of the trees, the harbour and of human bodies I can tell you the line of the wind." He pointed to his breast. "And here, Mistress, I sense the drumming of the beast's pitiless heart whilst in my fingertips I feel the snapping and the breaking of trees, the uprooting of trees, the lifting of houses and of stones as the edge of the demon's tail passes over or near to the litter of little islands dotted along the Peninsular's east coast and out into the China Sea."

"Hope Island!" cried Janet, fear in her voice.

"B'gad, yes! and Lowth taking Day across there today." Grant looked at his watch. "They'll have docked by now, though, as they started on the turn of the tide."

"Not only that, John!"

"The rubber you mean. Those Braziliensis. The plantations Lowth's renting from Still for three years. Yes, b'jove, the deal that's to put the Stills on their feet at last is at the mercy of the elements this day and no mistake."

"Yes, but worse than that, dear." Janet pressed her hand to her gentle heart. "Elinor's baby is to be born this week. Dear David has gone over to help her through her hour." She covered her face as lightning slicked across the sky. "From lightning and tempest, from sickness, disaster and sudden death, deliver us, Good Lord," she whispered.

MOTHERHOOD CRUCIFIED.

'Coming events cast their shadows before them,' says the proverb.

A debatable statement.

Except for an occasional twinge in the nerve of the conscience root, a prophetic malaise engendered by some past misdemeanour meriting punishment, the bolt from the blue crashes, more often than not, without warning upon the unprepared and unsuspecting pate.

Had you chanced to see Elinor Still, her back to the door which shook under the wind's pounding, her arms stretched across the creaking timber you, lacking Robert Still's prophetic vision, would have seen in her a woman far gone in pregnancy and nothing else. The wind hit her through the door, shook the broad shoulders already heaped with life's burdens, caused the head with its abundant yellow hair to sag slightly forward and rattled the straining timber under hands roughened in a never ending endeavour to make both gaping ends of a stiff existence meet. "Bob!" she called, a drop of sweat, forerunner of the agony she must endure before the storm was spent, trickling from brow to thin cheek down to the firm mouth and strong, square chin. "Come, man, if you can. I daren't move to shoot the bolt and if the door blows open whilst the scullery door's open the roof will lift." She looked down to where her first-born, almost miraculously conceived after hope had died, lay under her heart. "Thou art a crown of thorns, my son," she said and shook her head and smiled at Robert Still when he came running.

He stood in the doorway to look at her. "Motherhood crucified!" he said and ran to her, proud of the fatherhood which had made of the once slim woman nothing but a jumble of poor clothes, a shadow-splashed face and the ungainliness of maternity against the door.

"Why did you say that, Bob?" she said when he kissed her. "Just when I was thinking that motherhood is a crown of thorns which glorifies whilst it draws blood."

"Because you look as though life had nailed you to your destiny in the shape of the Lord's Cross, Nell." Still stood away from her as lightning flashed across the window to the west. "Both arms out, head bent and the babe under your heart the wound in your side."

Drawing her shawl about her, a poor wrap added to garments as poor because of the expected visitors, Elinor sat down on the long-chair and leaned back, against decrepit cushions in faded covers. "But the storm is behind us, Bob." She took up her knitting and looked over her shoulder at the clouds, all orange, red and dun, which chased each other past the window, listened for a moment to the clattering of the rubber cups against the tree-trunks and began to knit.

"Life's storm, Nell."

She stretched her hand and pulled him down beside her to discuss the past whilst waiting for the harbour siren to announce the arrival in port of any craft which had had the hardihood to run before the 'weather' predicted twenty-four hours back.

Stubborn, religious in the most undeviating, trusting, narrow meaning of that word or state, dour a bit, tena-

cious, Malay born and bred, Robert Still had fought hard for a foothold in the unskilled labour market. Obtaining the coveted jumping-off point in the guise of Coolie Supervisor, or some such post necessitating nothing much more than honesty and strength of will, he had set to to learn all he could about rubber. Gleaned here, gleaned there. Garnered the knowledge in his wise head and gambled with a sparse handful of dollars on the first whisper of a boom. Added the result to the sparse handful. Splashed lightly in other markets and repeated the process more than once. Becoming acquainted with Elinor, the stalwart only daughter of Missionary Wood, he had, through her, come to know Janet Grant and Grant some time later. Following the latter's lead through the convoluted labyrinths of a pukka rubber boom he had seen the end of that with a goodly round sum to his credit.

Wedding Elinor Wood on the proceeds he had subsequently put all his financial eggs into one basket. He purchased the top of an island off the Peninsular's east coast and washed by the China Sea. The purchase had included a stoutly built, one storeyed bungalow and a bankrupt livestock. A cow, goats and some ragged poultry. An ideal spot, the island, to Still's rubber mind for the planting and cultivating of the Helvea Braziliensis, a rubber tree imported from Brazil via Kew Gardens and which, so far, had failed to come up to Malayan expectation. His coffers badly depleted by the purchase, christening the concern the Hope Company and the island Hope Island and the shanty Hope Bungalow he and Elinor had set to to fight fever, sickness, tempest, fly, pest, weed, native

cupidity and duplicity, jeers and the temptation to sell. Uprooted one dreadful night of storm the Braziliensis Plantation, in its fifth year, had dropped into the sea and that just after the first tapping which had justified the care bestowed upon trees, soil and robber coolies.

Collecting the junk which included a roof or two, a fruit-grove, cocoanut trees and other trees, they replanted the Braziliensis, christening it The Leah Plantation. Fortifying the soil against torrential rain and tropic heat with low-growing, soil-holding, moisture-containing leguminous plants, enriching it with nitrogenous constituents such as the sensitive plant, the passion flower and so forth, they added many more acres calling them, because they would reach perfection in seven years about, The Jacob and Rachael Plantations.

And this the seventh year, the Seventh Heaven.

Having lived for six years on eggs and goat-milk with an occasional microscopic and tough hen for a treat; having toiled like slaves and beaten hollow every saint upon the calendar in the dire art of renunciation and sacrifice; faced unexpectedly with the problem of finding the funds necessary for the increased coolie labour and the transport to the mainland of the Para Rubber, which was perfect, and the Assam Rubber of the same category; scared to the soul and once more almost down and out they had returned thanks upon their knees the day the storm had forced Bramly S. Lowth's yacht to run for the safety of Hope Harbour.

That had happened two months back, on the day of the first tapping when the latex had brimmed the cups and the

coolies had chattered about its most excellent quality. The millionaire made them an offer, a week later and after due consideration upon the profit likely to accrue to himself from the bargain he intended to wangle rather than drive with this lonely couple so badly up against it on the lonely island.

He offered to buy The Island outright and the offer obstinately and stubbornly turned down suggested renting the three plantations and a fourth, planted with Elasticus, for five years. At a seemingly bonny price. Paying them in addition to the rental so much per cent on the gross proceeds of the rubber market sales. Robert and Elinor had seen nothing but a direct answer to their prayer in the offer. It meant an assured income for five years. Security instead of agonising suspense and unceasing, cracking labour. It would enable them to save and renounce and sacrifice still more so as to put by for the child to be born to them. And to-day would see the contract signed, this afternoon when the trees bent double to the tearing wind and the roofs to the coolie lines lifted and sank, lifted and sank.

"Folk will think we called our boy after the Cristophe, the French tapping knife, wife," Still remarked as he took the steel tool out of the pocket of his old drill suit.

"When we shall have christened him really after Saint Christopher who carried the Holy Child through the flood on his shoulders, as folk are carried through the flood of disaster if they'll just hold on tight to the Cross." Elinor smiled, pulled at a gold chain round her neck and opening the front of her faded blouse showed the fine

chain knotted and tangled on her blue-veined, full breast. "You don't know how that cross marks me, man. I lie on it in my sleep at night and in the day it presses me under my clothes." She jerked the chain and pulling a thin, silver cross up laid it, warm and sweet, against Still's cheek.

He turned the cross about and held it out on the palm of his work roughened hand. "I'd put it on a piece of ribbon short about the neck if I were you, Nell. If the cross presses and you think about it over much it may mark the youngster, not that it would be anything but a hall mark to be proud of." He straightened out the chain. "And if the babe should be a girl, what about the name then?"

Elinor laughed. She had thought about that. "Boy or girl, Bob, it will be the Lord's gift so let us call her Christine." She shook her head as the wind roared over the house and a door banged, clasped her hands, frightened eyes at the window across which the ugly coloured clouds fled. "If I weren't a Christian, Bob, I'd pray that Mr. Lowth might come soon. Now. So that we could sign the contract whilst there's a tree still standing on The Island."

Still took her hands. But she was a Christian. They had relied implicitly upon the Lord to pull them through, to help them win against such desperate odds. He had not failed them. He would never go back on them if they never went back on Him. He got up, crossed to the window, shook his head and came back. "It looks black, Nell, as bad as bad can be but the Lord will see that we or our child shall prosper here if we never go back on Him.

Never. By the most fragmentary lie, the smallest deception, the slightest broken word." He knelt at the knee of the woman he loved most dearly and bending his head, prayed.

And so Malay, the native servant, found them.

She came running to the south door, gay in a coloured 'sarong' and bright head handkerchief, bracelets, anklets and fine teeth flashing. To beg her Master to go down to The Jacob Plantation where one of the old mangoes had fallen across a tool-house.

"No, Bob! You mustn't go out!" Elinor spoke sharply and stood in Still's way. "Supposing a tree fell on you? The old mangoes come up like weeds in a wind like this."

"Supposing one fell on a coolie and I safe indoors, Nell?"

Elinor clung to him. He pulled her hands apart as the harbour siren shrilled above the storm. Patted her cheek. "Silly girl, there'll be Lowth to keep you company and I'll be back in ten minutes to sign the deed and eat a hearty tea." He rubbed his strong hands. "Jam and cream, just think of it!" Kissed her, loving her. "My wife and child in one, bless you both." Pulled her sorry shawl over. "Hide yourself from men, dear. Your sacred state is only mine. My very own. Say nothing to anyone, yet, about the name we have chosen. Our boy or our girl is only ours, yours and mine." He kissed her again, warning her to keep doors and windows tight shut against a direct draught and went away by the south door leading to the kitchen and scullery whilst Elinor tidied up the tidy room a little, as is the way of women even on the brink of disaster.

THE BUSINESS MAN.

Elbows on the table amongst the tea-things, Lowth, the childless millionaire, heart filled with child-hunger, the end of his days doomed to be childless, watched the woman, so soon to become a mother, on the further side of the table. The movement of the broad shoulders as she lifted the heavy tea-pot, the drawn face with its expectant eyes, the fold of the poor shawl pinned across her breast with a mosaic brooch once bought in Italy by someone. "To think of it!" He spoke slowly, bitterly, his thoughts with his own wife. "A child to be born to you two who live on a strip of land which barely divides a meagre 'enough' from gaunt 'want' whilst I, able to give a boy, six boys, a girl, six girls, their hearts' desire, must go to the grave a childless man." He brought a heavy, hairy fist down upon the table. A man who had had a son and lost that son was a sad man, a man to be pitied. A sonless man, East or West, was a disgraced man. There was no getting away from that. None. He pushed Elinor's sympathetic hand away. He was called a hard man. They said he drove hard bargains. He was. He did. But that was only because his bitterness and disappointment had come to roost in his heart like a lump of gall. He got up to look at the cradle, a home-made affair with washed muslin curtains tied with ironed blue ribbon; fingered the small pillow trimmed with used lace, the make-shift blankets; crossed to a seaman's chest, a second-hand bargain which stood across the south-west corner and turned over the darned sheets, pillow-cases and towels inside it; came back and sat down again.

His wife was past the age of child-bearing now but she had never been capable of childbirth. Never. Something wrong with her. Something to do with an accident in her childhood. Nor had that been the worst of the worst bargain he had ever made. Knowing herself incapable of bearing children, her parents as wise, she had not only married the successful young man who craved a son above all things else but had fooled him through the years, until quite by chance he had learned of her sterility. "I'm due to retire, Mrs. Still. I ought to retire. I should have if there'd been growing children about my big houses and my estates. But I'm not retiring. I'm going on working. I mean to die in harness. If I stop work I sink into the bog of loneliness up to my nostrils. Drown in it. Die before my time in it." He stretched his strong hands. "Harrow. Oxford. Any career he liked for the boy. Fishing. Shooting. Houses. Estates. A yacht and all the rest he could want. Everything a girl could ask for. But no son. No daughter. No child." He frowned when a door banged and got up when Malaya, wide-eyed and ready to panic, beckoned him through the doorway, asking for help with the scullery door. "You'll have the roof off, Mrs. Still, if you don't take care," he said, patted Elinor's shoulder in passing and stopped to pull the shawl a little closer. "Still's sheltering at the coolie huts I expect, at least he is if he's wise as the days of the Passover are through with."

"Passover?"

"The Lord's intervention in time of disaster, my dear." He turned in the doorway. "Religious you'll remember what Moses said to the Elders of Israel:

'And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood of the lamb and strike the lintel and the side-posts. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel and the two door-posts the Lord will pass over the door and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you.'

He laughed, a savage sound. "That's one of the few things in the Bible I know how to quote. And for why? I'll tell you. Because if I'd been one of the Israelites there'd have been no need for me to smear my lintel and door-posts with lamb's blood. For the simple reason that I should have had no first-born, let alone a son, to worry about." He pushed Malaya away. "I seem to have children on the brain to-day." He went to the scullery, outside the door, holding there to the woodwork against the wind.

Coming up from Sumatra way the typhoon passed from west to east. Bird's Point, a high rock or small mountain to the south, and on which a beacon should have flared at nights, protected the bungalow built on the east coast and back towards the centre of The Island. On the west coast two wings of rock, natural breakwaters, stretched out into the sea. Almost overlapping they made the narrow entrance to the harbour difficult. There was the strong current between The Island and the distant mainland to tackle, the tides and the winds to study but port once made the shipping there would be safe in the very worst of the bad storms which swept down from the north or up from the south or in from the China Sea.

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A drowned goat bobbed about the entrance to the harbour, pulled here by the wind, pulled there by the current. A dull booming, as though a giant wooden hammer beat a giant metal gong, came from the east. The typhoon's outer edge, a tearing wind which raved about the monster as it pranced across the water, piled the waves one on the top of the other. Flung the cattle, trees and bodies it had brought along from towards Sumatra into the swirling, tossing mass. Pulled them out again and flung them on the shores of the little islands dotted here and there. Pulled them off to send them, on heads, on heels, this way and that to their destination. The dead goat, caught in the current, had been swept round The Island to bob against the breakwater. A hawk, wings closed, scooped in by the wind and hurled, a feathered bullet, from the mainland, broke its neck against the Point and stayed where it had hit, held against the rock by the wind. Waves flung back from the heart of the typhoon met those flung forward by the wind from the south-west. They met, reared, broke and scattered their spray like grotesque fountains. Once Lowth heard the shouting of men and the snapping of timber, watched a Braziliensis, the little gourds banging against the trunk, tossed like a match into the air and after it, diminutive red sarong a flag of distress, a child carried out to sea like a leaf on the wind.

Elinor's scream as a window pane broke, reached him. He ran. The wind in a straight line from the broken pane to the scullery door met him like a wall. He flung himself down, caught the door-frame and pulled himself sideways into the room whilst Elinor, her shawl flying out be-

hind her and caught at her neck by the mosaic brooch, strove to force a cushion through the broken glass.

"Can you hold it whilst I shut the scullery door? If you don't the house lifts." Lowth shouted, eyes upon her silhouette sharply defined against the whitewashed wall, swift brain working out the detail of the hardest bargain he had ever thought to drive. There was a chance of wresting his heart's desire from the disaster threatening The Island. Threatening the Stills. The shadow of his heart's desire he should have said, his wife's sterility having forever denied him the substance. For so much down he——

"Bob, where is he?" Elinor whispered, her yellow head pressed against the cushion which beat upon her forehead like a soft, warm fist. She clung to the window, peering out to the west, when Lowth pulled her away. He fixed the window tight and led her to the long-chair, his eyes upon her sacred ungainliness. "Bob, where is he?" She looked round, fear in her eyes, fear in her heart. "Where do you think he can be?"

"Watching his fortune slip through his fingers into the sea from the coolie lines, I should say, Mrs. Still." He pressed her down onto the long-chair when she screamed and covered her with her shawl. To hide her. From himself. He played with the fringe of her wretched wrap, his eyes on her desperate, working hands then, afraid of her, of her helplessness, of the drop of human kindness in every heart, got up. Abruptly. Roughly. To shore his ruthlessness. Straddling the worn hearth-rug, hands deep in his pockets, he drove his bargain as he would have driven

a nail into a wall. He was a business man with a business proposition to propound whilst the woman, intuitive, instinctive, sat with her hands on her knees, her breathing sharp through the fine, strong teeth.

She listened. Nodded. Yes, life was undoubtedly nothing but a string of hard facts. Like bricks in a wall and as hard as bricks. Yes, she agreed that to prevent those bricks tripping and throwing you the best method was to tackle them at once, one after the other, as they presented themselves. But what had that to do with the typhoon which threatened to strip the top of The Island bare and wrest the smiling future out of her and her man's hands? She fingered the cross under the old, worn blouse. Yes, she confessed they had come to a dead end the day the millionaire had made the offer to rent the three plantations. "I'm not smiling in an eneavour to hide our bankrupt state, Mr. Lowth. Indeed no. And you must try and understand how eternally grateful we are to you, how——"

He cut her short. Nine times out of ten he had found an expression of gratitude nothing but an insidious means for gaining some desired and hidden end. Not only that. He explained, concisely, brutally, that up to now neither she nor her husband had anything to be grateful about. *The contract was not signed.* He as brutally described the tree in the air, the goat in the water, the approaching pandemonium when the typhoon, right out to sea, would draw level with The Island. He pushed the tea-tray to one side and sat on the edge of the table. "When Still comes in, my dear lady, he'll do it as a pauper if I know anything of

the Malay. He'll own the clothes he wears, the stripped top of The Island, you and the baby coming to you. Sit *down*. There's nothing to be gained by dashing helter-skelter out into the racket to find him. Accident? If there'd been an accident someone would have come for help or collected Day from where I left him wrestling with the wind and the heathen soul at the harbour bend. If the top of The Island gets shaved as clean as I was this morning you'll perhaps have a roof standing to your credit, perhaps not. Your cattle, goat, poultry, grain, cocoa-nut, fruit-groves and coolie lines 'll best be described by that." He made a circle with his fingers. "A nought."

And how were they going to feed the coolies? Pay them their arrears and their passage to the mainland? Lord, yes, he knew all about it. That they were two months behind with wages. She couldn't tell him a thing about The Island he didn't know. He didn't keep the finest compradore in the East for nothing. And just here the business proposition came in. One involving several thousands of pounds sterling and to be negotiated strictly between themselves.

"Still must never know about it. We——" He cursed under his breath and stopped speaking at sight of a face crowned by a mop of russet hair at the window. "There's Day!" he said.

Elinor ran to the window, pointed to the back of the house and turned to Lowth. "Can't David Day know about this business, too, my friend? If ever there was a man of God, a saint on earth, it is David Day," she said.

Lowth would have none of it. He would not hear of

the little doctor-padre being included in the conference or consulted about the deal nor could he see why such a fuss should be made about the little priest who ran round and round the Archipelago, like a squirrel round a cage, ministering to the heathen. There were scores of girls and unwed dames who would give their eyes to exchange their sterile, unwedded state for a golden ring with the little fellow in holy orders and the famous Nut Basket attached.

"David Day married! With children!" Elinor repinned her shawl as she crossed to the door. "I heard he was never intended for the Church. That he threw up medicine and became a missionary because of something that happened to someone he was fond of, out here in the East. I think it was his brother." She nodded when Lowth put finger to lips, and opened the door wide.

THE SQUIRREL PADRE.

Thirty-two years old, small, spare, a crop of russet hair, the broadest mind, the biggest heart in Christendom to his credit, the Reverend David Day, M.A.M.B. came into the room, Malaya, all smiles, behind him. His thick soles clattered, he let what the Peninsular and the Archipelago had christened The Nut Basket, drop with a thud and, all good-fellowship, took Elinor's outstretched hands in both of his.

Compared to the Stills' austere, narrow, undeviating religion his was as a soft cushion to a granite rock. It shone like a beacon from his good grey eyes, dropped for-

ever as a benison from his humorous mouth. Hopped joyfully after the manner of the biblical hills. Ran here to help. Climbed down to save. Went down to the gutter and further down to the abyss. Fought the monsters of debauchery in all its grades and sin in all its pleasing and nauseating disguises. And that so as to add still more Nuts, as he called them, to the well of his basket.

His brother, so dear to him, having come back from the East foul with sin's aftermath and forced, to the end of his broken life, to walk with the aid of sticks to steady his paralytic limbs, Day, a brilliant medical student at the time, had endured intensive coaching to hurry his degree and with that to the good had entered the Church. A step for which he had no direct calling but which he intended to use as a key to locked doors. The brother dead, he sailed for the East, the ports of the Archipelago his goal. Nor did anyone, even his most intimate friends, the Grants, Ann Elliott and Hickory Hicks, know the true history of the Nuts.

They lay in the little well at the bottom of his basket, covered by a wicker flap, flannel by the yard, imitation pearls, bibles, acid drops, gramophone records and so forth. Real nuts, gathered on the spot. Each one the symbol of a white male or female soul saved. Retrieved from the gutter. The native hut. The edge of the jungle. The jungle itself. This obscene dancing-house. This brothel. That man. That woman. And each nut an identification mark, scratched with the initials of some home relative of the lost white sheep. A brown nut for that London girl removed by force, with fists and threat of revolver, from

the white slave house. A green one for the public school boy who washed a harlot's linen for a living. Oh, no end to the nuts in the well of his funny Nut Basket.

No prospect, no desire of a return home for him. Just the dedication of his life to the task of going round and round the ports, the towns, the villages, ferreting here for a soul and there for a soul. Gathering them from the sewers, pulling them back from the brink, lifting them towards the stars, his weapons in the stiff, unending fight, a meagre stipend, the donations of friends, a pair of fists, a mastery of the Malay tongues and a most perfect integrity.

He clopped across the room in his heavy shoes right into the middle of a drama of which he was to know nothing until twenty years had passed. He looked about for Still, suggested going to find him, at once, but fell for that one cup of tea which, in keeping him from Still, perhaps brought about the disaster.

The storm passing? Indeed it was not. He shook his head and crossed to the window. The lull in the roar of the wind and the water indicated, he thought, that the heart of the typhoon had digressed slightly towards the east.

Living on husks he appreciated the good things which sometimes came his way and whilst asking and answering questions peered under covers with the license of the old friend. When would the contract be signed? Ah, as soon as Still was back. He was glad. He was well acquainted with the process known as living from hand to mouth. A painful procedure which lent an edge to the

already rampant gastric juices, sharpened the wits and dulled the horizon of each succeeding day. Were the doors and windows tight shut? That was good. A direct line between the south door in the room and the east door in the scullery would doubtlessly see the bungalow en route for Cambodia or somewhere as remote, or the mended part of the ceiling over the sink, and just inside the south door, down about their ears. He asked Malaya about the door and when she swore it bolted as well as locked thought it might be as well to verify her statement. He did not wish to insinuate that the Malay was a perverter of the truth, but they certainly did seem to find the convolutions of deceit infinitely easier to master than the straight and narrow path of veracity which would lead them to an ultimate heaven.

He clopped across to the Nut Basket and brought it back. Peered into it and extracted from it three small parcels wrapped in tissue paper of long service. "An extra yard or so of white flannel, my dear friend, Elinor." He undid the minute knot with patient, economical fingers whilst explaining that the spare yard had been intended to renew the back of old Daddy Bag o' Bones' shirt which had at last succumbed to the fretting of the osseous frame and his ancient daughter's laundering during the last decade. "But I have the promise of an entire shirt. From our dear friend, Ann Elliott, whose sharp tongue and open hand have worked such wonders at the Foundling Home in the Dindings." He enumerated the type of Dindings foundlings whilst tapping the teaspoon on the table. White, half-caste, yellow foundlings. Whole, diseased,

repulsively diseased foundlings. All pushed into the revolving cradle and confided to the care of the good sisters who doubtlessly expressed their repressed motherhood in devotion to the mites. He waggled a parcel. "Extra tips for the bottle and, what do you think, a bunch of bottle cleaners made from white hen feathers. Hairy kind of things like caterpillars on stalks." He undid the other parcel and laughed, a rich, warm sound welling from his rich, warm heart and in striking contrast to his quiet, sweet voice. "Cheep!" he said and put a white, woolly parrot with beady eye and red beak into Elinor's lap. "That pensive ornithological specimen is from our good friend, Janet Grant, who is presenting our good friend, Grant, with, let us hope, a son and heir in due course." When the massing clouds suddenly smothered the daylight and lightning lit the room he jumped to his feet, vetoed using oil until the storm was past and lit the eight-hour candle on the mantelpiece.

"It should burn for quite eight hours," he said as the wind rattled the door viciously and flung a bird against the window. "I wonder what will have happened before it has quite burned out?" He beckoned Malaya in from the scullery where she stood making signs, listened to what she had to say and turned to Lowth. "A mango's fallen across the compradore's house and as the coolies have panicked Still wants one of us to steady them by lending a hand. I'll go. They know me." He covered his eyes as lightning flashed and thunder rumbled right out to sea then laughed and unclasped Elinor's frantic hands from his arm. "It's true, my friend. I would never lie to

you. If anything had happened I would have told you at once. God never gave us courage just to wrap up in the napkin with the lost talent." He patted her hand. "And the sooner I'm gone the sooner I'll be back with your man as I'm bringing him with me." He smiled at her, confided her to Lowth's good care and was gone at a run.

Lightning sent Elinor reeling from the window. Thunder grumbled round the roof. Lowth pulled her down onto the long-chair, put the woollen parrot into her convulsive hands and watched her difficult breathing. How much strain could a woman so near her hour, stand? How much anxiety and crushing fear would be necessary to bring her to the breaking point where another's opportunity patiently waits? She began to pull the parrot to bits, thread by thread, her eyes from the window to the door and back again. Lowth spoke to her. She shook her head. The roar of the wind, the pounding of the trees against the outside wall, the swaying and creaking of the house deafened her.

"We'd better get near the west door," he said and tried to pull her up.

She resisted, shook her head and pressed her hands down to still her child's leaping. A tree crashed against the door, the top of it against the window. She ran to the window, pointed and called Lowth. "That's a Braziliensis," she shouted, "the top of The Island's gone," and wrung her hands as the wind dropped suddenly and Malaya came in running.

"Oh, bad, bad, bad!" she cried and beat her breast. "All gone. Trees gone, cow gone and Master——"

Lowth flung her back into the scullery, followed her

and listened to her disconnected tale of Still lying crushed under a tree. Ordering her to be quiet and to keep silent he went back to Elinor who stood, a grotesque figure, waiting in the gloom.

"Bob!" she screamed. "What had she to say about Bob?" She shook Lowth in her terror, looked suddenly down at herself and pulled the shawl about her. "Bob's dead! Bob's dead and The Island's stripped bare!" She shuddered at a dart of pain. "And my child to be born." She drew her hands down from her neck to her knees, shaking her head. "Bob dead! My man gone!"

"He's not dead." Lowth spoke harshly. "He's hurt. A tree fell on him. Day's doing what he can but it's up to you, Elinor Still, to save his life."

She drew herself up, squared her shoulders, a splendid figure against the candle-light which spun a nimbus from her abundant hair. She drew herself up because of the menace in the short, sharp sentences. Looked at Lowth. "Tell me how to help him," she said shortly and looked about, instinctive, feeling the net closing.

THE SALE.

"Sell me your child, Elinor Still," Lowth whispered, tempting her, his voice like silk in the heavy silence. "Before it is born. Two thousand pounds for your son, my dear, a thousand for your daughter. More, I think, as your man's badly hurt, very badly hurt, and the top of The Island's slipped into the sea with your future and your savings, your labour and your dreams. Three thou-

sand and The Island restocked for a son, yes? and a thousand, five hundred, sterling I mean, and The Island restocked for your daughter. Yes?" He stroked his heavy chin, watching her wrathful eyes.

"You want to buy my baby?"

He pointed. "Just as it lies there."

"You *dare* say such a thing! You *dare* say such a thing to a *mother!"*

Lowth went warily, ears strained for the sound of men carrying a heavy load up a steep path. For their voices. Above all for Day's voice. What he had to say must be said in a whisper. What he had to do be done quickly. He stepped behind her to do his tempting. And that because, so wealthy it was almost impossible to rightly estimate his income, he could not face her eyes whilst he proposed the outrageous sale. Whilst he took advantage of her mental and bodily agony to grasp the opportunity which would be there, to be seized when she reached her breaking point. He sat down, facing the window against which the broken branches of the rubber tree tapped. He whispered. "Listen," he said, a relentless figure in the gloom of the one candle. "Still's crushed across the abdomen. What does that stand for? I'll tell you. A big operation. A long convalescence. Who's going to pay for the last even if he gets the first done in a general hospital? Who, first of all, is going to get him across to Singapore in time for the operation? for Dodson, the abdominal specialist, to perform the operation? A small branch, a twig, has pierced the abdomen. To what extent? Has it pierced the intestine? Will it set up peritonitis? Have you a

boat? No, but I have. Can you pay Dodson his high fee in his nursing-home? No, but I can. And his life after? if we manage to get him across in time to save his life. Is he going to get well? knowing that you and he," he pulled the shawl back, "and that child in your body still, will be beggars, dependent on the charity of the ports which have no use, none, for the down and outs. Has he a chance? I ask you. Honestly, has he a chance? No, not half a one unless you——"

"No! no! *no!*"

He put his hands on hers, patted her shoulder. "Listen, my dear. What if he heard the great news that someone, a far distant relative, a cousin removed to the n'nth degree, had left you, shall we say five thousand for a boy and three thousand for a girl? Don't you think he'd be up and about in no time? don't you think *hope'd* put him on his feet?" Elinor covered her face with a corner of the shawl. "Listen. Besides the capital, the five or three thousand, I'll pay for the operation and Dodson's nursing-home. Not only that. I'll send my head man with his best coolies to replant the top of The Island. I'll send you the very best grain, seeds and cattle in the Malay. Come now! Yes or no?"

Elinor sprang to her feet. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" she shouted. "Christ was never tempted by the devil as I am being tempted now!"

Lowth smiled to himself, nodded his clever head when she clung to the head of the chair, riven with pain. "Right!" he said, making no effort to help her. "So much for that man of yours. Bob Still who's slaved his life out

for you. My God, you women! I marry a cheat. You, for all your highfalutin' yapping about your love for Still, refuse to help him when he's down and almost out. God, but you make me tired. Sick. If you won't help your husband can't you think of your son? Can't you think of someone beside yourself? You'll be a widow before tomorrow's sunset because, before God, Still dies if he doesn't get to the mainland before then——"

"That's a lie! You're lying to break me!"

He laughed. Just as she liked. And he hoped she'd remember his warning when she found herself stranded with a child to keep and rear. She was none too young and none too good-looking. Hampered with a brat she'd find offers of marriage scarce and the unskilled labour market choked with the half-caste which could live on throw-outs and a pittance.

Elinor turned on him. "Why don't you go to the Foundling Home at the Dindings? Ask Ann, Ann Elliott for what you want?" She pulled her shawl roughly out of his hand, sought the cross at her breast.

And risk the beastly characteristics of both unknown parents? Not he. He wanted the type of boy you could send without fear to a public school, the type of girl who would be a credit anywhere. Lowth got up, massive, powerful, master of the situation as he had been master of many though none so cowardly as this. Supposing her child was still-born and the contract unsigned? What then? Suicide he imagined would be the only door left open to the pair of them. He crossed to the desk, placed a sheet of paper neatly on the pad, looked at a cheap red

penholder, wrote quickly and blotted what was written. "But if the child's still-born and you've signed this?" He crossed to the fireplace, straddled the old hearth-rug and shook the sheet of paper out.

"My son! My son!"

"Listen to this, my dear, sign it and you're on the road to fortune with an assured future for the other children which will come to you." He tapped the paper and sidetracked with a light dissertation on the probability of women of her age once started in maternity being fecund until the period of reproduction ceased. Elinor hid her face in the faded cushions as he rattled the paper and began to read.

'I, Elinor Still, wife of Robert Still, of Hope Bungalow, Hope Island, the China Sea, agree to sell my unborn child to Bramly. S. Lowth of The Woodlands, Woodleigh, county Bucks, England, and the Firm of Lowth, Far Eastern Merchant of Singapore, upon the following conditions.

If my child is a boy I receive from Bramly S. Lowth five thousand pounds sterling within a month of the child's birth. The Island is restocked at his expense with the finest rubber and fruit trees and the finest cattle procurable.

Every building destroyed or damaged will be rebuilt or repaired by him.

Arrears in servants' wages will be paid by him.

Also the expense of the operation and the subsequent nursing of my husband now lying sick unto death.'

Lowth repeated the last line, sharp eyes on the woman's convulsive hands.

'If the child is a girl I agree to sell her to Bramly S. Lowth for three thousand pounds and under the above conditions.

If I give birth to twins I agree to sell the boy.

If my child is still-born, whether boy or girl, I receive one thousand pounds only.

I agree to have nothing whatever to do with the child I have sold and to be content with news of him or her once a year.

And this sale I have agreed to solely to help my husband and to lay the beginning of an assured future for the other children which may be born to me of him.

September 14th 1929.'

"I can't!"

"You can." Lowth sat down beside her and put the red penholder into her hand, his mind searching for the last straw with which to smash her resistance. He found it when the wind moaned. "The storm's coming back, Elinor Still. They're bringing your man up the cliff. Slowly, so as not to shake him. Is he to come in here a free man? rid of anxiety? or a dead man, killed by your selfishness? It's for you to decide." He drew away from her when she crumpled up with pain. To leave her alone in the pending agony. To force her to seek comfort from him, to ask his advice, his help.

She looked at the pen in her hand, at the window, at the door through which, a free woman, she would never

walk again. "What would you call him?" she whispered and Lowth smiled to himself, the fight won.

"Choose his name."

"Christopher!" The name rang. "And a strong name after it. A God's name. Still is a strong name. 'Be still and know that I am God.' " She laughed, a sound like a broken bell.

"Christopher Strong." Lowth added a line to the bond and laughed, the sound of an unclean triumph. "My second name's Strong. Bramly Strong Lowth." He flattened the paper on the seat of the chair, put her hand on it. "Come. Sign and be ready to meet your husband with a mind at peace."

"Bob!" Elinor sprang to her feet and ran for the door. "I must tell him. I must ask him." And screamed and caught her knees, rent with pain. "No! no!" she whispered and turned and leaned against the wall, her fair hair a streak of gold down her back. "No! no!" She rubbed her cheek against the sheet of paper when Lowth slipped it in between her face and the wall. Her fingers closed round the pen with which she was to sign away her motherhood. She signed, sweat like tears on her cheeks, and drew her shawl about her as men tramped into the kitchen bearing a heavy load.

BIRTH AND DEATH.

An inch of candle left.

Still lay on a mattress on the scullery floor. Lowth waited beside him, fingers in his ears to dull the sound of human agony which came to him above the storm and

from the other side of the house. The door near which he sat faced the door through which came the dreadful sounds of a woman in travail. They seemed to reach Still in his drugged sleep. Twice he opened his eyes, moaned and went to sleep again. There were lulls in the storm which showed signs of abating but for the last two hours there had been no cessation to Elinor's moaning. Lowth's knuckles cracked. One after the other. As though he shelled peas. He had worn a hole in the reed mat with the toe of his shoe and sat beside Still watching the open door opposite. Day passed across the doorway now and then. Malaya all the time with linen from the seaman's chest, and hot water.

Lowth kept his eyes on the door because he lacked the nerve to look at the man on the mattress and from whom he had won his first-born by trickery.

Trickery, nothing else. Good fellowship, charity, the greatest of virtues, should have bade him lend the Stills, or give the Stills, for that matter, five thousand or ten thousand pounds. To set them on their feet again. To allow them to rejoice in the child to be born to them. His gift would have made no hole in his well-filled stocking. He would not have felt the loss of that amount. He could not look at Robert Still but not once did he regret his hard bargain or think of holding the signed bond to the flame of the hurricane lamp he had found in the scullery and lit in the storm's first lull. He saw no reason why he should. Three people beside himself would benefit by the transaction. Still, his wife and the unborn child.

Would the child ever see light? By what monstrous

process had childbirth been evolved? What had made it necessary for the highest type of female to face death in her task of populating the world? Had something gone wrong? Five hours of such sounds! He got up, walked as far as the inch of candle on the table covered with an old check cloth and came back to the doorway. He went to the window and looked out. The typhoon had passed. The waves still thundered on the foreshore but they no longer broke in midocean like giant fountains. The clouds still raced but through them the moon darted a silvery spear now and then. Except for a grove of mango trees and here and there a rubber tree, the cups clattering against the stem, the top of The Island was as flat as his hand. The compradore had come knocking at the back door to report the coolie lines gone and the place full of lamentation over the boy, a first-born, who had been blown out to sea and drowned. Indeed were the days of the Passover no more. Even had The Island smeared its lintels and door-posts with blood there seemed to be no God about to have taken notice of the sign. And would the night never, never end and bring the dawning? Still was so white. He barely breathed. Had the sharp branch pierced the intestine and would he be dying, there, of internal hemorrhage? An ugly, greyish white with a bluey tinge spread about the mouth. What if he did die? That would release his wife from her bond. It had been solely for Still's well-being and the welfare of the children to be born to her of Still that she had consented to the sale of her first-born. Still must be kept alive. At all costs. He held the lamp close to the death-white face just as Elinor

screamed. He sprang to his feet, outraged to the depths of his being at the sound and ran to the doorway as Malaya ran across the room to the seaman's chest in the corner.

"In God's name why don't you give her chloroform?" he shouted as Day crossed the further doorway, wiping his hands.

Day took no notice. Malaya took no notice. Lowth left Still who had stirred at the screaming and ran into the living-room, to the table where the candle guttered. There was the sound of crockery. No, the sound of steel. God! and the tearing of linen. Confused words. Day's encouraging, cheering, sustaining.

"Come now, dear friend, come now!"

"No! no! no!"

Malaya laughed. And what was that? Listen. A child crying. A little sound, very thin, very shrill. Then it was over. All over. Would they never come to the door to tell him if a boy or girl had been born? But if it was over why was Elinor moaning so? He looked at his watch. So early. Barely two o'clock. Why was the woman moaning? Listen? Day's voice, gentle, encouraging, so sustaining.

"Splendid, my friend. There now!"

Elinor's voice, blurred with pain. What could she be saying? Was she dying? If she died he would never be able to claim the child. He would not dare. He would never be able to face David Day's eyes. She must not die. Listen. The moaning. The creaking of the bed. Terrible. Terrible. Day speaking and through it all the sound of the child crying. What had happened? Elinor could not be dying because of Day's voice. So kind. Almost a laugh

in it. Listen. A sobbing cry. Elinor Still's voice and Malaya laughing. He took a step forward as Day came to the far door, wiping his hands, eyes bright in a tired face.

"Twins. Boy and girl. How's Still?"

Incapable of speech Lowth pointed.

Day clopped across in his heavy shoes, wiping his hands, bent over Still and turned the sheet down. "He'll do." He went on wiping his hands then opened the east door in the scullery and spoke to the compradore who waited there, in anxiety for his master. "I want the fourth house-coolie's wife, Compradore. I have to take the Master across to the mainland as soon as Ombak thinks we can go and Malaya must have someone to help her."

"Honour me by making use of my wife, Tuan," replied the Malay, a pawn on Life's chequer-board, the mouthpiece of Fate. "She has a child at the breast." He touched his forehead. "She is not over intelligent here nor does she think or move outside the circle of the cooking-pot which holds the welfare of her house, but being the mother of five children, four of whom are sons by the grace of Allah, The One and Only God, she has some knowledge of this process of birth which is the same whether the mother be queen or coolie, white, yellow or black." He salaamed and went blithely with the glad news of the birth of a son to the Master, marred a little by the arrival of a girl upon the scene within the same hour, and of the honour conferred upon his wife.

Day looked round at the scene of desolation. Of the Jacob, Leah and Rachael Plantations there was not a tree left standing. To the south-west the Point looked as

though it had been shaved close, the grass of the ledges, sprung from seed dropped by birds, had been bruised black by the wind. The roof of one tool-house hung entangled in the grove of old mangos, the only trees left. In one a dead hen perched like an untidy, white bundle. Of tool-houses there was no sign, with the coolie-huts they had been swept out to sea. The Point had protected the house and because the top of The Island stood some hundred feet above sea-level there had been only one death by drowning.

"Well, we shall have to see what can be done to set them on their feet again," said Day to the desolate scene as Malaya came running, clapping her hands.

"Tuan, you come quickly. I have something to show you. I have found something on both babies." She crossed two fingers. "Like that. Like the cross on the Mistress's gold chain. And black as night. Here on the son." She pulled her sleeve up and touched her left arm at the back, well above the elbow, then turned and touched the point of a shoulder-blade. "And here on the girl." She laughed. "On the beautiful boy-child it will not show but on the inferior girl-child it will be seen when she grows up and wears one of the evening dresses in which all the white ladies show all their backs so shamelessly."

Day nodded. "A birthmark, Lowth. Evidently the result of the pressure of the cross the mother has worn always, both day and night." He crossed to Still. "It bears out my theory that the thought of the fanatically religious parent is the foundation, is the reason of the stigmata."

"Stigmata?" said Lowth whose religion began and ended in taking his wife to church on Sundays, weather permitting.

"The mark of the Holy Nails on the hands and feet of some new-born male child, the mark of the Holy Wound in its side. Supposedly miraculous in the Middle Ages but nothing really but a transmission of thought." Day discoursed learnedly and lucidly upon the power of thought as Malaya, all smiles, ran back to Elinor and her children.

When the wind loosened the cushion stuck in the broken window pane Day, occupied with Still, called Malaya.

She came, anklets and bracelets clashing. Came because it was ordained she should. Because there was to be no witness left of the outrageous sale, the cruel sacrifice.

Nothing by which to warn the just born brother and sister of the perils ahead.

The Compradore's wife, living within the circle of her cooking-pot as a hen supposedly remains inside a circle of chalk, swallowed lies, legends and fairy tales with as much ease as her family her spicy stews. Tell her the west wind blew from the east and she would not trouble to wet her finger and hold it up to verify the phenomenon. Tell her a hen had died in the night and she would take the disaster for granted, without troubling to count her chicks as a check against theft.

Malaya ran into the kitchen as the wind pushed the cushion out of the broken pane. The current of air, direct with the east door opened in the scullery, drove chairs and tables in a heap across the doorway. The ceiling over

the kitchen door cracked, bent, fell on the woman and killed her.

At noon, Still upon a stretcher on the deck beside him, Day watched the birds circling the Point.

At the bedside Lowth looked down at his adopted son.

MILESTONES.

The Twin Psychology.

The Stills never came down from their niche in Singapore's high esteem and there was always something to tell about them to those who happened into the City of The Lion on business bent, for a spot of fun or a felicitous combination of both.

First, Still's partial recovery from intestinal injury then, during convalescence, making part of it undoubtedly, the news of a legacy. Five thousand pounds, a godsent sum left Elinor by a cousin removed to the outer limit of the n'nth degree and who had seemingly just passed to the realms where generous cousins go. That certainly did help put Still actually and figuratively on his feet, Elinor a sturdy partner behind him, the small grave under the mango tree a subject taboo by mutual consent, their daughter a source of constant discussion.

Owing to the substantial balance at the bank Still won out. As they had wrestled with the question of clearing, felling, burning, selecting seed and planting; with thinning, damage by pest or soil-wash, otherwise damage due to torrential rain; with the making of silt-pits to hold the superfluous water; the coolie question, the building question, the transport and cargo-boat question so, lately,

in the watches of the night, did they wrestle over the advisability of telling Christine about her twin brother.

Elinor was dead against it.

Janet Grant had given birth to twin boy and girl eight months after the night of the typhoon and Elinor, a welcome visitor at Latex Villa, had acquired a certain insight into the psychology of twins. The effect separation, even for the time necessary in which to wash and dress them, had upon them. The restlessness, the whimpering and then the full-lunged howling. The way, later, they slapped about in the same plate of porridge, to their nurses' disgust, and screamed if a door were shut between them. Their growing habit of giving each other the best toy or the nicest of anything to be divided between them.

"If we tell Christine, Bob," said Elinor in a stout nightdress beside her shirted spouse in bed, "she may feel, all through life, as though she had lost something, as if a door had been shut between her and her brother. She may never settle. The sense of separation may become an obsession with her. As it seems to possess Billy and Molly when anything happens to keep them apart." She spoke with hands clenched under the sheet, the only outward sign she ever allowed herself of the bitterness of her sacrifice and the horror of the self-inflicted torture she endured during her visits to Latex Villa where the twins triumphantly reigned. "Janey has a whole heap of books on twins, their psychology and things like that. Tricky things, twins, Bob, and not to be forced out of their double-single path." She sat up in bed, a strong figure in the

light of the one candle. Christine would learn about her twin later but there was no one to tell her about it now. The Compradore and his pseudo-midwife wife, with the very best of references and a substantial sum to their credit to save their 'face,' had been transferred to the mainland to find new posts. Malaya was dead. Lowth had retired from business and returned to England where he had adopted a son. David Day was also strongly against the secret being told the child yet awhile. Christine's nurses were faithful, reliable creatures and she would not come in contact with others of the servant quarters. By the time she did hear about her brother her mind would have been trained, stabilised. She most certainly would regret her loss but by then her life would be too full of interest for her to dwell upon the loss to the point of it's becoming an obsession with her. "I've a Scotch streak in me, Bob. I'm foreseeing. Something, intuition or foresight, tells me to let Christine get over her childhood before telling her, and when I get that forefeeling I never go wrong if I stand by it." Upon the strong fingers of her capable hands she counted the instances in which her foresight had helped her. But Still was not of her opinion.

He did not sit up to expound his way of thinking because sitting up usually caused an intestinal streak of pain but he argued just as convincingly from his back. Nothing had ever been gained in the long run by deception. Nothing, ever, by not trusting in the Almighty. Those who deceived went about like criminals wanted by the authorities, always in fear of a hand upon the shoulder. Those who did not trust in God were like those who pre-

ferred keeping their money in a stocking instead of in a long established banking concern. They were at the mercy of any marauding hand slipped under the pillow or wherever the stocking was kept. Her foresight was nothing to boast about. It was a freakish twist shared by crystal-gazers, fortune tellers and others who got run in for defrauding the public. God's promises were not of the pie-crust variety. He had said through His Son: 'Let little children come unto me:' and He would not have said that had He intended worrying Christine with the loss of her twin brother and to the extent of it becoming an obsession with her.

For nights they argued. In fact until Day paid them a visit. He slept in the lean-to known as the guest-room and tapped upon their door after midnight to borrow a needle and thread with which to close an aperture in his net against an insect on the wing. In a festive pyjama suit and heel-less, leather slippers he flapped off into the living-room in search of the work-basket, came back and sat down at Still's invitation at the foot of the bed on which his host and hostess lay stretched after the manner of knight and dame upon a mediæval tomb.

"I looked for the old work-basket, my dear friend," Day said and nodded, believing he understood, when told that cradle, long-chair, work-basket, in fact all that had had to do with the night of the typhoon, had been relegated to the attic. Elinor told him, taking the needle and thread with steady hand, but she did not tell him that she, herself, had carried those dumb witnesses of her dreadful bargain, her cruel sacrifice, to the attic and there, flinging

them one on the top of the other, had covered them with a dust sheet, in a vain endeavour to blot the night from her memory as she might have passed a sponge over a slate.

"We were just discussing the advisability of telling Christine about her being a twin."

Day drew his feet up, tucked them on the rung of the chair where they perched like a brace of brown fowl. He looked at Still. A hard, abrupt man in nowise improved by sickness. Not impulsive. Of a mind which, once made up, set with a concrete consistency. From him he looked at Elinor. A silent woman who seemed in the last years to have lost the gift of laughter. Strangely quiescent, too, when compared to what she once had been. Take, for instance, the none too pleasing incident of the headstone to the little mound under the mango tree. Something upon which to record the birth and death of the boy twin. Still, in the austerity of his harsh religion, had put his foot down upon the bare suggestion, arguing this way. Forgetting she had the right to christen the child in the absence of a priest Elinor had allowed the boy to die unbaptised. The child had not died a Christian and therefore lay in unhallowed ground. The grave was nothing but a lost dream under a tree and one did not erect monuments to either lost dreams or unbaptised children. Elinor, the bereaved mother, had said nothing. Had stood aside. Had left the mound to the head gardener to keep clear of weeds. She had begged Day never to mention the birth of her children. He had not. How could he when he believed her heart broken through the death of her son.

"I'd have a care, Still," he said this night, perched on his chair like something seen in a dream. "The twin psychology is totally unlike the solo ego's complex. I think Christine is quite normal but what about this sense of loneliness she's beginning to complain about?"

"That's because she refuses to mix with girls of her own age," replied Still tersely. "She shies at them. Sits in a corner at the few parties she's been to in Singapore and lets it be seen when the children come over here that she only plays with them with an effort."

"The child is so solitary, David, that we've given up the little parties altogether."

"And she makes such a scene when we accept an invitation for her that we've stopped accepting any." Still frowned. "And as she'll have to know some day she might as well know now. If we don't tell her someone else will."

Day prayed inwardly for light, as was his custom, and having prayed spoke to the best of his ability upon the tricky subject of one complex splitting into two, the split halves each retaining the whole complex without the loss to it of one jot or tittle.

"It is a pity, I always think," he said gently, "that milestones are so unobtrusive."

"Milestones?"

"Milestones?"

"Take a journey by car." Day ran his hand over the shock of red hair. "To help the traveller the kind authorities place milestones along the high road, to advise him of the distance between here and there, don't they?" The others nodded. "Now if the traveller only took the trouble

to check his watch against the milestones he would be able to synchronise the distance to be covered with the time he has to do it in, would he not? You nod. Of course he would. Do we? We do not. We tear hell-for-leather—a more sporting than clerical term I take it—for our destination. We rush past those instructive grey obelisks at the roadside. With what result?" He looked at Still who gazed obstinately at the brass bed-knob, at Elinor, pleating the sheet. "With the result that, mistaking the distance to cover, rushed in consequence for time, we hurtle round the corner and crash into what might have been avoided had we only allowed ourselves time for observation whilst we travelled." He pulled at the collar of his gay pyjama suit. "After the crash we either fail to arrive at our destination, arrive too late for the dinner, festivity or important meeting or limp in with the aid of some Good Samaritan on the look out for lame and unobservant dogs."

"I think——"

"Wait a moment, Bob."

"You were going to say, Still, that I'm miles from my argumentative destination, weren't you?" The little man smiled, a quaint figure in the dawning. "I am not, as you will see. I am discovering to you a possible psychological milestone on your daughter's line of life——"

"Oh, psychology!"

Day ruffled his red head. He thought it the best word to describe the first impression made upon a child by its first encounter with such affections as hate, fear, loneliness, trouble and death. Why did he leave out love, laugh-

ter and beauty? Because they were not milestones. They were not outside influences like their blacker counterfoils just enumerated. Love, laughter and beauty were life's padding. Like the soft lining put into a cradle to prevent the babe from hurting itself when it kicked. "Christine has begun to complain of a sense of loneliness yet refuses to mix with other children. That loneliness, Still, a mark on her road, thrown there by the past and shadowing her future, is the first milestone for you to study for her. In her interests. For her five friends to study in her interests. Janet and John Grant, Ann Elliott of the Dindings, a godly woman, Old Hiccoughs—oh, I beg his pardon, indeed in all Christianity and friendliness I should have said Hickory Hicks—and myself. But especially myself, for her future guidance."

"Why especially you?"

"Because, Still, I have not only studied the twin complex, I am a part of that intricate mechanism. I am a twin."

The Stills sat up very straight, staring at the little padre in the festive pyjama suit buttoned with decorative buttons and, too taken aback for speech, made divers sounds of astonishment in their throats.

Day joined his fingertips. They knew about his brother of course. The whole Archipelago did and of his own reason for giving up the medical profession for the Church or, rather, of making a combine of the two. He felt in his pocket and pulled out a nut from under the gay blue handkerchief. A big brown nut, highly polished and carved. They all knew about his Soul-Nuts. Of his self-

imposed mission, because of his brother's indescribable death, to save as many white folk from destruction as a life-time would permit. The Archipelago the chosen field because of the disaster befallen his brother there.

He held up the carved nut.

"This represents my brother, my dear friends, it is carved with his initials. I have told no one and I know that you will tell no one that my brother was my twin brother, the elder by one hour, my other half, indeed a very part of me." He held the Nut out on his palm, looked at it and shook his head. "We begged my father on our knees to send us both to the East or to keep us both at home. He wouldn't listen. He was as hard and pig-headed as you, Still. He separated us and we were the kind of twins, there are different kinds of twins, you know, who think and speak as one. The kind which share one life between them. Just as Billy and Molly Grant can bring each other from a room by willing, so could we. Just as they forestall each other's wishes, so did we." He looked at his gay pyjamas, pulled the coat a little, touched the decorative buttons. "I haven't noticed this in Molly and Billy, they dress like any other jolly kids of their age and of course they're far too young to bother about such a thing but as we two boys grew older we began to take an immense amount of trouble with our clothes and that simply to *please each other.*"

He pulled the jacket out by the pockets.

"This is a copy of the suit my brother had made for one long vacation. It was his first effort to please me, sartorially speaking of course. Up to then we had worn

what came first, leaving the article of wear and its subsequent appearance to the good care of the washer-woman or linen-room maid." He looked at his pyjamas. "That first choice led to, as I can see now, a most interesting insight into the twin complex." He looked at them and smiled. "Although we were both exceptionally good at the wicket we might have been two old maids over our wardrobe. The colour, the cut, and of course only in our underwear. In our night-wear for instance, something out of range of a public school's stern and conservative eye."

He shook his head when Still frowned.

"Listen. That first impression of vanity, or, I would rather put it, of beauty of covering, was a milestone, Still, which, if it had been brought to our father's notice, would never, never have allowed him to separate us. But he did separate us. Jonathan, his real name was James but we were always David and Jonathan to each other, was sent out here to try out in rubber. I was kept at home to coach for my degree. We wrote each other every day, sometimes twice a day. We were consumed with an agonising loneliness. I wrote him my heart's agony and he his to me." He stroked the sleeve of his jacket. "Then something went wrong with the mail. He had been sent up country and had no letter from me for over a month. I am afraid my father destroyed his cables to me, anyway I never got them. Jonathan thought I had forgotten him. As if I could. As if a twin *could*." He clasped his hands. "His loneliness drove him down to a port. He fell to the first woman clever enough to make him believe that sex gratified could fill the gap of my silence. She was a port

parasite, beautiful and diseased. You know the result. Creeping paralysis and death. Death because he could no longer run. Death by his own hand."

He shook a finger at Still.

"Take my advice, Still. You wouldn't before. You remember? I urged you to tell Christine about her twin whilst she was quite a baby. As soon as she would be able to understand. You refused. Had you done as I asked she would have grown up with the knowledge of her loss and you would have been spared this ugly situation facing you and which is nothing but a side product of her increasing loneliness caused by the lack of her twin." He thumped his silk knees with the palms of his strong, impressionable hands. "Take my advice. The advice of a twin. Don't tell her now. Not yet. She's too young and she's too old. Psychologically it's the wrong moment. She's too untrained. Too impressionable. The knowledge of her loss, now, would only increase her loneliness and would give her a legitimate excuse for brooding. Just as she might take a snake's egg, handle it, keep it warm and watch over it until it hatched out and stung her, so she might brood over her loss until it became an obsession."

He shook his head.

"You can smile, Still, if you like. My zoological metaphor may be a bit hazy but theoretically I am sound. I know what I am talking about. So does your wife. Keep the child out of doors. Get her interested in botany or birds, anything out of doorish. Keep her away from the Plantations. She knows almost as much about rubber as you and in one so young that is neither healthy nor nor-

mal. Have her vetted occasionally. Try to get her to mix with other children. Try and make her, without forcing her, to go to school and then, when her mind is thoroughly steadied and she has forgotten, in the manifold interests of her life, of youth, this first milestone, this impression of loneliness, then tell her."

Still flared suddenly. He disliked his small daughter. Try as he did to love her, pray as he did for the hardness of his heart towards her to be softened he could not bring himself to forgive her for being alive when his longed for son had died. And now this fresh psychological problem. Nerves ragged from constant dragging, physical pain he resented it. Botany. Birds. The vet and all the rest? Absurd. Nonsensical. "She's showing off, Day. Children always do at her age." He slammed his pillow over. "The thing to do is to pull her up with a jerk, steady her and keep her steady."

Day turned at the door. "You're wrong, Still. The child is feeling what the fellow who has had his foot off feels. Long after the operation. That the lost member is still here. Under the cage. At the end of the bed. His sensation, though nervous, comes through physical injury. Christine's feeling is purely pre-natal, the aftermath of her close companionship with her brother before birth."

He leaned against the doorway. To rid the patient of the sensation about his foot one had to draw his attention from it. Distract him. Get him thoroughly fit and get him up. That was what they would have to do with Christine. Go slowly. Bit by bit. The last thing to do would be to pull her up. To jerk her. They must never forget they

would be working on two souls. Christine's and her twin brother's. The twin might be dead but he might easily come alive in her mind. Become a part of life to her. A shadow. To haunt her. Obsess her. They should watch her closely. If her twin brother did lay hold of her out of the shadows, lay hold of her mind he meant, of course, then she would become secretive about him. "If she begins to talk to him, as twins do when apart, she'll do it when she's alone." He pulled at his pyjama trousers. "Remember that we two, Jonathan and I, took infinite pains over our underwear. Something *hidden* from others."

He half closed the door.

"The dawn is coming. The insect will have flown away. Light will come to you, Still, if you will have patience. If you will wait. And with the light anything likely to harm Christine will also fly away." He opened the door a little. "Look back from where you stand, Still, and you, Elinor, my dear friend. What do you see? Milestones. Those signs which our own parents, governesses, tutors and nurses allowed to pass unheeded in their haste to get or to get us something, to get us somewhere or to somebody. We have not been trained in observation because our parents' reasoning powers were untrained. Had my father observed our agony when separated, a milestone on our road plain enough for anyone to see, he would have taught us self-control. That taught, my brother would not have fallen to the port parasite and would doubtlessly be alive to-day, to our mutual joy, or honourably dead. It is a milestone for the Grants to read as they lead Molly and Billy along life's path. Their love

for each other surpasses that of most twins. Were something to come between them, and they untrained in self-control, it might lead to disaster. Christine's growing sense of loneliness is a milestone for you to study, especially as I have pointed it out to you tucked away in the hedge."

He closed the door then altruistically opened it again. "I'll tell her about her twin brother if you like. Only later. Nothing would make me take the risk of telling her now."

Still took the risk.

AN IMPRESSION OF LOSS.

In spite of Elinor's entreaties, on her knees, he took Christine, so much younger and older than her years, to the mango grove. The following night. And there explained things, oblivious of the face puckering and of the way she kept on shaking her head.

"My brother," she said, twisting her frock in small, hot hands. "You mean the same as Molly and Billy are the same. One. Only I'm not. I'm a half. I'm by myself." She tapped the little mound with the tip of a small shoe. "I didn't think that cut in half twins could live. I don't think Billy and Molly would if they were taken away from each other." She bent and touched the grave, her face very white. "I don't think I understand what dying means, Father, but I will try." She looked up. "Do you think that this is why I feel so lonely? Would Mother know, do you think?"

She did try to grasp the meaning of death. She wrestled

with the subject in her disturbed nights. Birth she understood after a fashion. The goats and cows, one of the pair of small ponies, the hens, ducks, cats and dogs of The Island appeared at stated intervals with small things exactly like themselves beside them. She had been told that the small things arrived through a process known as birth. But death? She had never been allowed to see anything dead. She thought death must be a kind of door which shut itself between you and someone you liked, say your nurse, or something you liked, like a kitten or book. She visualized the door as solid and took to opening doors unexpectedly, looking into or out of a room quickly and shutting the door again.

Hearing of it, Day spoke his mind to Still whilst Elinor tried to break a way through to the shy child's thoughts.

Christine edged away with her puzzle, applied herself to her lessons and played half-heartedly with her favourite animals then, obsessed with the thought of her twin, took to pretending, as Day had feared she might. She held a two-sided conversation with this mind-shadow. Made room for her shadow-twin in bed beside her. Offered him sweets and read to him aloud. Totally fearless she crept from the bungalow one night and crossed The Island to the mango grove. Whatever she expected to materialise failing to, she crept back to bed. Nor was anyone ever the wiser nor did she repeat the experiment.

AN IMPRESSION OF DEATH.

Unable to withstand the humidity the Malay has to offer twelve months out of the year, Still died. Elinor had

gone down to the harbour with Ombak, the skipper, at dawn. Coolies kept guard outside the quiet room.

Death.

Christine, nine years old, had heard the word repeated all the past day. In her own tongue and in the many Eastern languages she spoke owing to the patience of her various and devoted nurses.

Here was her chance of looking at the door called death.

The door which someone had shut between her and her twin brother. Which made her feel as though something had been cut off her, as the coolie child had had a leg cut off after falling down the rocks. Perhaps if she could see her father in this death sleep she might be able to understand how her brother had been shut away from her. It might help her to find the death door, open it and bring her brother back with her. To work and play with her. To sleep in the same room as Billy and Molly did in Singapore. Holding her nightdress tight about her she waited behind her 'chick.' Someone tapped with a hammer on wood. She must wait for that sound to stop. Tap. Tap. Tap. Something was being made in the timber yard near the south plantation. Tap. Tap. Tap. She could not wait for the disturbing sound to stop. Quiet as a little mouse she tip-toed down the verandah to where the guard slept outside the reed blind through which the light of two big candles shone. The wind from the sea lifted the reed blind now and then. She pushed the blind against the guard a little so as to get him accustomed to its moving. He stirred and went to sleep again. She lifted the blind and crept in.

Her father slept. Then was death just another kind of sleep in which you smiled and which made you look very white? He had on his best night-shirt, too. The one with the pretty buttons. No, this death was a kind of curtain. A face-veil. Rather like the 'yashmak' the Mohammedan women wore out of doors or before strangers. It kept you apart from them. You knew who they were but you couldn't exactly see them.

She stood at the foot of the bed and crept her hand along the sheet towards her father's hand. If she touched him would the veil lift? as the Mohammedan women lifted their veils indoors. But what if her touch disturbed him? wakened him? She was a little frightened of the stern man on the bed. His prayers were so fierce and long and he forced her to learn so much of the bible through the week. The Catechism had developed into a perfect nightmare. She did not think her Mother loved her very much but she was softer, less stern. Helped her in her lessons and sewing. Took her about the plantations and explained things. Had her in to tea when the planters called on business and insisted upon her talking to the servants in their own tongue. Her mother's face seemed to change in some way when she asked about her brother and she always refused to get the cradle in which her brother had been put. She clasped her hands tightly, too, and her father always frowned when she spoke about her brother.

No, she would not waken him from this death-sleep which required candles and flowers. A bit of the sheet stuck out near the pillow. She might tuck that in though he lay so still he had not tossed the bed clothes at all.

She might also move the pillow frill. It was so close to his cheek. It might tickle him and waken him and he evidently wanted a great deal of this death-sleep to get through the long journey she had been told he was starting out on at dawn and about which her Mother had gone down to the harbour with Ombak, the 'serang,' perhaps about a boat to the mainland. She tucked the sheet in and with gentle fingers moved the pillow frill.

The knuckle of her middle finger touched Still's cheek. She looked at her knuckle. At her father. Frowned and rubbed her forehead as though her mind had been touched with her icy middle finger. No. This death-sleep with its flowers, candles and iciness had nothing to do with her brother. It was not the door shut between her and her brother. He had never been cold like that. She would have known if he had. At once.

Just as Molly had known when Billy had fallen into the tank at the end of the compound. By feeling all cold and wet herself and running out screaming to find him.

No, the face-veil look of the death-sleep had nothing to do with her twin brother and all she had to do was to go on opening doors until she found the one behind which she knew he waited for her. She would go, now, and peep at the little mound in the mango grove. Everyone believed he lay under the little mound. She, of course, knew he didn't but it was no good trying to explain that to people who hadn't been born a twin. She would just look at the little mound and would be at the harbour in time to say good-bye to her father when he started on his long journey.

She went to the mango grove in a dense mist but she

did not go down to the harbour. She was wrapped up in many blankets instead and shaking with fever though even in her delirium she said nothing of her bare-footed pilgrimage at dawn.

AN IMPRESSION OF SEPARATION.

She made her convalescence at Latex Villa, arriving there in the middle of a psychological upheaval. Molly in tears from morning to night and sobbing in her sleep. Billy white with the agony of being forced to leave his twin sister behind when he left for school at home.

Arms about each other, a week after her arrival, the two came to find Christine. Not to once more pour out their woes but to ask her help. They sat on the end of her bed and offered her chocolate. Not as a bribe but because they liked her so. The preliminaries over they asked her if she, a twin and therefore an authority upon the subject, though they worded it differently, would beard the lion in her den by going to their mother's room and urging her to persuade their father to send Molly to England with Billy.

"We like you awfully, Chris, you know." Thus Billy with cheek against Molly's. "If we could split ourselves ever so little we'd haul you in and make a three twin of ourselves but we can't."

"No, we can't. We've talked it over but we can't." Molly rubbed her nose on Billy's shoulder. "We're awfully sorry but we're so just ourselves we can't find a speck for anyone else inside us."

"I understand that. Quite." Christine got out of bed, a lovely slip of youth in a very young and unsophisticated nightie. "I will tell you something because you will understand." She pressed her flat young breast. "I feel just as though I'd been cut in halves here and I keep on the look-out all the time for my brother. To see him. For him to come to me."

"He can't. He's dead."

"Yes, I know, but my heart hopes. I can't tell you why but my heart hopes."

"I think you should have a baby, Chris. That seems to satisfy everyone, doesn't it, Billy? I mean puts everything straight."

"Yes, there's Wanda. You know, Chris, Wanda Watkins. She stopped giggling and wriggling every time a man came into the room directly she had a kid."

"And Dolly, Chris. You know, Dolly Dowding. She hasn't been out for a single moonlight picnic since she's had a baby."

Arms round each other, Molly's eyes bright with recent tears, Billy's with resentment, the twins followed Christine to Janet Grant's door. Christine knocked. Janet tore the pins out of her hair, combed it with her fingers and said 'come in.'

Christine went in, rather like a candle in the dim room. "I've come to talk about Molly and Billy because I'm a twin, Auntie Janey," she said and sat on a chair near the bed.

"What's up, Janey?"

"Come here, John."

Big, burly, Grant came in. He looked at Christine and raised his eyebrows at his wife. Mouthed Molly and Billy at her, nodded and offered the child biscuits which she refused as she was not staying long.

The Grants thought they knew all there was to know about twins. Birth had seen Molly arrive in the world within ten minutes of her brother. Life had seen them, so far, always in the same degree of proximity. School hours alone separated them at present. The night their parents had thought it time they should begin to sleep apart and had put them into separate bedrooms, locking the communicating door, they had battered the door in. Billy with an inlaid chair of great value, Molly with everything handy, and for the most part breakable, in her room. They had fought like tigers to get at each other. Not cubs, adult tigers. The house, scared and wakened by the smashing of wood, glass and china had rushed to find the infuriated couple, dry-eyed, speechless with rage and spattered with blood from wounds and scratches, clinging to each other through a split door panel. Day had prevented Grant from thrashing Billy and had curbed Janet's hand which ached to spank her daughter.

"Carefully with twins, you two," he had counselled. "Psychologically they are totally different to the solo ego. Where one leads the other follows. If one calls the other answers even if they're miles apart. Hit temperamental Billy and, his finer feelings hurt by the injury to his person, he may leap the parapet to your roof-garden. If he does Molly goes after him. Let them share the same

room. Let them sleep together if they want to until he goes to Felstead en route for Harrow. That'll separate them. It'll about break their hearts but they'll know it's a legitimate separation." He had pulled the elders a little closer. "There'll be trouble with Christine one of these days. She's a solitary. She won't mix with girls of her own age because she's one of a twin and *knows it.*"

And now this. Christine, because she was one of a twin, here to intercede for Molly and Billy.

"Well, young lady?" Grant sat down beside his bonny wife, arranged her disordered hair and patted her cheek. "What's up?"

"I've come to say that you'll both be murderers if you send Billy away from Molly." Christine put her hand on her heart. "You can't divide twins if they don't *want* to be divided. I know you see. I am a divided twin. You must send Molly to England with Billy so that they can see each other sometimes. I've prayed about it and I know. I've got them out there on the mat. Will you send her? Her nightdress is all wet down the front with crying and Billy's coughing. He can't cry because he's a boy but he's coughing dreadfully and I think he'll pine to death for Molly if he doesn't see her sometimes." She thought hard for something with which to drive her argument home and found it. "And I'm perfectly sure Molly will go blind if she cries any more, Uncle John. Her eyes are all blood-shot and puffy like that dreadful beggar's on the quay. May I bring them in?" She might. She did. "And will you send them home together, to keep them alive?"

Billy and Molly went home together.
Christine returned to The Island.

AN IMPRESSION OF SECRECY.

The first time, a year later, when Christine paid a visit of some length to Latex Villa, Janet Grant's eyebrows shot up into her hair. She called Grant and indicated the pile of luggage guarded by two 'aya' in the hall and later, Christine and her maids safely out of the way, went with him to the child's bedroom. There they opened the drawers and lifted the silk covering silk underwear, rows of folded silk stockings, expensive shoes, sachets and ribbons. Very pretty, very simple frocks hung in the cupboards and behind them, almost hidden, were many lovely petticoats. The dressing-table showed ivory and crystal. Bought with what the child made out of various corners of The Island over which her mother had given her full control, from the clearing to the tapping, the last done with the Cristophe, the French tapping knife, the child being under the impression she had been named after it.

They looked at each other, smiling when they remembered the care Christine took of her long, fine hands and, as her aya, Ria, had told Janet's aya, of her beautiful feet.

"She seems to worry more over her 'neaths than her uppers."

"There must be some hidden meaning to it."

"Would you believe it? She looks such a scaramouche on The Island in her one-piece frocks and bare legs."

"Let's ask David."

They did and he, after his wont, retired to think the problem out. He hit on the reason as he got into his pyjamas preparatory to getting into bed. Instead he took his pipe out onto the roof-garden, elevated his feet to the parapet and worked things out. Satisfied with his answer to the conundrum he flip-flapped round the roof to where the Grants slept under their net. He coughed at some distance, to allow Janet the time to tear the curlers out of her hair, as she had done the night the house had caught fire. Whilst waiting he pondered upon the deplorable familiarity which bred contempt for gilt upon conjugal gingerbread. He had always thought it bad enough for the married to tumble into the same couch with all the hugger-mugger of that dread familiarity, and rather after the manner of cattle returning to a well-know byre, but for the life of him he could not see why marriage should see the cake so stripped of its pretty coating as to expose the plain dough underneath.

He fidgetted the festive blue buttons to his gay silk suit. He looked better at bedtime than at any other time. The loose collar after the clerical starched fence had an almost Chelsea aura. The handkerchief matched the blue buttons. There was a certain abandon to the cut of the seat and a rakish slant to the trouser hem.

He would have told you, had he been prone to gossip, that he had long ago got over the loss of his brother, that life passed amongst the dense population of the lower reaches of Eastern ports was enough to knock anything psychological, psychic or merely sentimental, sideways.

But it would not have been the truth. The truth was that the spirit of his twin was always with him. Sharing his bed, his board, the fun and many dangers of his extensive travels. The rooms kept for the little priest all over the Peninsular and the Archipelago were miracles of masculine neatness, his outer raiment stereotyped, his underneaths anything but the quaint wear one would have expected of so confirmed a bachelor. He saw to it that his food, simple though it might be, was well served, excepting of course in those backs o' beyond where one blindly eats what is put before one without worrying as to origin of species or enquiring into the method employed for cooking the gastronomic conundrum.

And this insistence upon a certain elegance, upon neatness and simplicity was nothing but a 'spirit-offering' to the dead brother who haunted him and who had endured such torture of heart and mind about there.

He was glad he had on his grey silk pyjamas with the blue buttons. Glad they had come back from the wash in time. They were his star set and were to form the pivot of his explanation of the latest problem, of Christine's unusual wardrobe. He watched the Grants coming towards him and thought conjugal familiarity just like middle age. A coarsening. A settling. A lack of physical elasticity and mental spring. A kind of rootless fungus which spread and spread until it obliterated entirely the fine detail of whatever it covered.

Why?

Marriage was just as much a life sacrament as the Communion. If the one was administered with newly cut

flowers and spotless napery year in, year out, why should not the other sacrament remain as fresh and uncrumpled? Janet's nose shone. That indicated a lack of interest in her nocturnal looks. Her nightdress, under a wrapper, was either too short or too long. It lacked both the skittish abbreviation of the frisky and the flowing grace of the picturesque garments he had willy-nilly to encounter or rather observe, when questing for Soul Nuts in the houses of ill-fame there and about. Indeed the thing looked as though it had definitely warped. Her slippers were like good resolutions. Easy to slip on and off. Grant's the same, turned in at the heel whilst his ugly simian chest showed unrestrainedly through his half-open pyjama jacket.

A pity! A pity!

The ordinance of marriage was not indeed to everyone's taste but once shorn of the fine feathers which made of it, at the beginning, a veritable Bird of Paradise, it was simply asking for trouble.

And here two more coming to join in the debate. To discuss Christine. Never. His mouth shut with a snap. Christine was nothing but a bud. A child of thirteen. Something to be sheltered from the winds of gossip and kept clear of the hands which stretched out for her. Singapore sought Christine. Not only was she beautiful and attractive in her own quiet way but she was also sole heiress to Hope Island, that gold mine set in the China Sea. He and her mother and the Grants were her guardians, sworn in to keep her from all harm. No, there were two other guardians of her peace and here they were. Ann

Elliott of the Dindings and Old Hiccoughs—dear, dear, he should in all Christianity have called him by his right name—Hickory Hicks.

The pair were beloved of the City and a perennial source of speculation. Why had they broken off their engagement all those years ago? The elders of the City could tell you that they had loved each other truly. And they had remained friends. Did they still love each other, then? Ann Elliott, whom the younger and more irreverent had begun to call Grannie Dindings, had never ceased to wear a gold locket which, embellished with pearls and turquoise, held a lamentable portrait of Hickory Hicks as a youngish man in a frightful blazer and bushy side whiskers.

THE WASTREL.

Hickory Hicks, known variously as Old Hiccoughs, the Tuan Ol' Ik, and Uncle Olly by the young, never failed to visit his one time sweetheart when she bore down upon Singapore and he was returned from his roamings. Surely that should prove the steadfastness of their love for each other? Then what had broken the engagement? A rupture which had thrown Ann Elliott violently into good works. Hick's sporadic alcoholism? or something which had bobbed up out of his past? The Malay had taken him pretty well for granted some decades earlier when he had happened into Penang with the usual yarn of the younger son with artistic leanings being flung out of the front door minus even the proverbial shilling. He

had most certainly been short of cash and he had most certainly been cut off. He had received no letters at all from home and had not boasted a single friend. The elders of the City could have told you that. Nor had he seen fit or deemed it necessary to inform those busybodies of the real reason of his adoption of the East.

Which had come about in this way.

In his youth he had taken to alcoholic stimulus. As a spur to fagged grey matter and a means with which to bring back the cunning to a right hand threatened with painter's cramp. The slight taste for it becoming a stranglehold, and developing into a species of delirious hallucination, he had been shipped on a cruise as cure.

Walking down the gangway in the regions of Cambodia he had failed to walk up it again. The ship had sailed without him. Changing his name, he had taken pains to lose himself and the family had taken no steps to discover the whereabouts of the reprobate younger son. Mural *décor* his means of livelihood when sober, changed out of all recognition by 'weather' and wine, he had subsequently drifted across the China Sea to the Malays which adopted him without demanding a reference. In his cups he borrowed openly, persistently and unashamedly. Nor did the lees poison him as the years rolled by. Indeed they seemed to be the key to the door behind which an abundant and varied knowledge had been stored. Sober, he was silent. Drunk, his lucidity in argument and dissertation shone, as said Masie Owens—long since gone aloft—like beacons across the flats of Singapore's materiality.

Ann Elliott he had met, fallen in love with, become

engaged to and lost within the first few years of his arrival in Penang. To prevent his heart from breaking over her loss he left a battered old trunk as guarantee of his return to a small room under a roof near the harbour and had recommenced his roamings. Sometime later this chronic wanderlust took him out Johore way and there he fell on his financial feet. He not only discovered a derelict bungalow near The Village of The Bulls, set inland from Johore's east coast and almost in a direct line with Hope Island, but he also ran across that old villain Binatang, the custodian of the Bull-Ring of the neighbourhood.

The bull-fights were well run, unauthorised affairs. Hicks in his school-days had been famous as referee on the milling-ground. The two foregathered. The Bull-Ring and the bungalow were within a stone's throw of each other and both surrounded by jungle into which the water-buffalo, drab, blue-eyed, fierce, untractable combatants could be driven and hidden at the first sign of outside interference. As the cock-fighting fans could carry the prize game-cocks, cages and all, into the scrub and hide there until the menace of supervision had passed.

The old wastrel became the favourite of all mankind, a generic term including women. Ann Elliott, or Grannie Dindings, never once doubted of his ultimate reformation, even if it had to be carried forward to the Last Trump. The giggling village women surreptitiously cooled his pounding brow and scorched mouth with wet leaves and refreshing herb possets, until he was recovered enough from the latest bout to take notice. Christine, who had come upon him prone upon the quay, adored him. She had

thought him dead. He had been. Dead to the wide. Dead drunk. All ministry she had sat beside him on the ground until shame had forced him to send her away. They had met often after that and at perfectly sober moments. She had a certain influence over him, fluctuating, perhaps, but always a step in the right direction along the slippery, boggy, thorny path of reformation. She had spoken of him to her mother who had spoken of him to Grannie Dindings who had urged him to seize upon his first period of sustained sobriety and accept the invitation to Hope Island. Which he had done. And which he continued to do out of love for little Christine. He ran about with her, white hair flying, blue eyes dancing, in and out of groves, round and round the plantations, up and down the Point, chasing her, playing games with her. He re-decorated her bedroom-walls. First with flowers, then with birds, then with the young things which appeared through the process of birth. Such as chicks, calves and ducklings. In return she would sit on the arm of his chair, her arm round his neck and listen whilst he discoursed on wines, life, the hereafter, the price of things, sport, this, that and the other with those there to listen, join in, agree and disagree.

His outstanding shame, an off-shoot of his alcoholism, he kept entirely to himself, though even he, because of his inebriety, had no idea of the depths to which he had sunk in accepting, within the last year, the invitations to dine and wine on the other side of the Bungalow wall.

THE HARLOT.

Harimau, the courtesan, lived on the other side of the wall, to the west of The Derelict Bungalow. The mud wall, into which sometime or another a door had been let, divided the two compounds.

Half caste, Malayan-Chinese, born without entrails, the most sought after woman in Asia entire, the wealthiest of her class and, to many, the most beautiful, she was forever on the lookout for some novelty with which to amuse the suitors for her favours. She financed the bull-fights and also revelled in them. Promoted the cock-fights in the court to her dwelling known as The New-Moon House—a name Hickory Hicks swore filled him with a consuming thirst—and hearing of the white man's arrival at The Bungalow ordered her handsome hunchback, Kechil, to find out all he could about him.

He reported to her about the pounding brow, the scorched mouth, the cheery ministrations of The Village and the sporting friendship between Hicks and the custodian of the Bull-Ring.

"A drunken, high-caste white man!" The laughing she-devil had invited the new-comer, as a high-caste white man, over the wall to dine. She snared him, she chained him to her through her famous cellar kept for the unorthodox of her Malayan suitors and the foolish young whites who, on the pretext of going after 'tiger' in the jungle further north, came her way from Singapore and round about.

Hicks dined with her alone. Night after night. She of-

fered him imported and native wine. She made him drunk and when he sang and capered in his cups, stripped him to his vest, crowned him with a pair of gilded horns and, to shouts of laughter, ordered the curtains between herself and her other guests to be drawn back. Convinced that the white man's obvious high caste would prevent him from entering her house again once he discovered the degradation heaped upon him, she threatened her staff with instant dismissal should even a whisper of the excruciating performances get about, shored the threats with liberal backsheesh, and raised a minor hell when, recovered from the latest bout, he slipped away to a perfectly sober period in Singapore.

She sent her Jester after him and there was not much the Hunchback did not know about Hicks when he came back.

"——and if you want to keep him, Mistress, as a raree show to entertain your guests," Kechil ended as he sat at the feet of the woman he loved, "you must provide him with funds. He paints walls for a living and truly with a master touch—what Mistress?—paint Harimau, The Tiger's walls?" The Hunchback had laughed. "He has a greater gift than that of daubing walls with paint. He knows how to decide between right and wrong on a field of sport or in a fight between man and man." He described what he had learned about Hicks as referee in divers tennis matches and a boxing match or so in the less reputable corners of the port. They called in Old Binatang and with him planned a perfect frame-up for the day Hicks should return to The Village of The Bulls.

He did so one unexpected afternoon of blood and churned up sward. Knives had flashed and cries from the infuriated spectators had been added to those of the enraged cattle. His Malay as perfect as any native's, Hicks, drawing a diagram with a stick in the blood and mud, had, later, proved without a doubt to which beast the victory belonged. The verdict acclaimed with much shouting, the harlot, veiled, the minx, had beckoned him to where she sat with the lover of the moment at her side. She flattered the white man. Talked to him for quite a while then offered him the post of referee to such bull-fights as might take place during his visits to The Village of The Bulls.

Perfectly sober, he hesitated. A white man to referee such bloody entertainment? A white man referee for a crowd of Malay, Indians, Chinese and imported negro?

Touching his Mistress on the arm Kechil had rubbed thumb and finger together. Tumbling to the hint she soldered the chain which bound Hicks to her. She gave him to understand that the referee would be importuned to accept a 'present' of many good chink dollars after each show and whether he made use of the whistle or not.

And so for a year and more, until this night when, certain the secret of his post as referee and this latest source of income was entirely his, he made one with the other worried guardians of Christine's welfare. On the south end of the roof-garden lit by the full moon and at the end of the semi-circle of folk in varied night attire.

Ria watched. Daughter of Malaya, whose forebears had seen the first hut rise in The Village of The Bulls, she made part of that collection of dwellings built on piles along

the edge of Tiger Stream and called by courtesy a village. Sunyi, the man-servant, wanted her as wife but, already cumbered with two, half the full complement allowed the wealthy and the foolhardy by Mohammedan law, he had perforce to wait for the ordained and desired moment when he could divorce either Wife One or Wife Two. Or both with luck and a little wangling. Indeed he should have got rid of them long ago. Wife One for shaming him with daughters. Wife Two for her persistent sterility. He had not for the simple and wide-world reason that they had become a habit, like slipping on your rings. He stood at the north side, entranced with Ria's face peeping through a bank of flowering shrubs. It would be good to curb her. She had a most independent gait and a defiant habit of clashing her bracelets in a man's face and knocking her anklets together behind his back when put out. He must visit her grandparents in The Village of The Bulls. He might be lucky enough to get a sight of the bulls and a chance of backing one of the famous game-cocks and even get a glimpse of the notorious harlot who spread bankruptcy in health, wealth and morality to the four points of the compass and to whom the shocking tragedy of a few hours back had been attributed.

Ria laughed behind the green leaves. She knew herself destined to be his wife. Perhaps his head wife with luck and a little judicious wangling. But not yet. Not until the Lady Kris took a husband. Nothing would induce her to leave her beloved Mistress until she were wed. She helped Sunyi wheel a laden table in and out amongst the guests

and smiled when Grannie Dindings rattled her stick against the wastrel's anklebone.

Hicks, translating the tapping into lemonade, took a glass of the nauseous mixture, held it until the liquid warmed, emptied the distressing concoction into a flower-pot then, disconsolate and dry, slid down into his chair and went to sleep until the end of Day's dissertation on and explanation of Christine's wardrobe.

"So you think that's the explanation, do you?" Grannie Dindings searched in the pocket of her pyjama suit, a stout, two-piece tussore affair. "Sounds a bit far-fetched to me. Making herself look as nice as possible because she's obsessed with the thought of her lost twin." She produced an ivory cigarette-case. "It's not because the male twins you once knew worried over their clothes out of love for each other that Christine should do the same over her wardrobe because of a dead brother, David, but I suppose you know what you're talking about." She offered her case. "Have one? You should. Vizier and velvety. I never smoke anything else and they're not the sort you buy at the same counter with your peppermints or sardines. That's right, John." She fitted a cigarette to her amber holder whilst Hicks, leaning slightly sideways, waited for Grant to light up then stretched for his host's glass, gulped the contents and lay back. He repeated the manœuvre half a dozen times, to Sunyi's unbounded astonishment over his abstemious master's frequently emptied glass, and to the infinite joy of Grant who, bored to extinction, longed for the old sinner to liven up the party.

He did. Quite suddenly. Just a little lit he sat forward

and shook his finger at Day. The others leaned back. Silent. The men expectant. The women apprehensive.

"You've been discussing a virgin's 'neaths, more shame to you, Padre." Hicks beckoned the table of good cheer. "You're wasting your time, Day, amongst the flowers of the forest and the weeds of the ports." He took a decanter, filled his glass, drank it neat and filled his glass again. "And I'll show you why by telling you of my picture on the wall."

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

He finished his glass and got up, swaying a little as he drew a picture on the air. Drew it from an hour just passed and out of the future and in which all those on the roof-garden, and others, were to be entangled.

"I painted this last week, for Gough—you know Gough—the handsome engineer fellow." He laughed a little, being slightly lit. "I painted it on the plaster wall—of his bath-room—so that when he bathed that magnificent body of his he could—he could ponder upon my writing on the wall—and repent in time. I wrote—I wrote in blood-read letters underneath:

'The Scarlet Woman.'

A fitting title, my friends—my dear friends—because although I drew Harimau, which means tiger in case you don't know—because I drew the harlot of The Village of The Bulls—as a tigeress lying across her prey, the predominating—yes, the predominating colour of the masterpiece 'pon the plaster wall is—is red." He smiled at them, nodded his white head. "As you'll see if you'll call. As all

those others saw when they crowded there this evening—yes, this very evening—just before I came along to you Janey, my dear, just before I ran into you along the roof, my Queen Ann." He sat down again, his face in his hands. "As Gough—as Gough saw it last week when he came back from what he was pleased to call tiger-hunting in the jungle—in the Johore jungle, to the east of the province." He looked up. "His tiger was a beast with two legs, a velvety, scented, jewelled devil. It had a beige, seductive body, a painted face with soft brown eyes and a damned and crimsoned mouth." He stabbed the dusk with a fork. "I painted her long nails as claws embedded in Gough's breast and so deep they drew blood. I painted glasses—I mean goblets—full of blood upon the golden tables of her bed-chamber. I drew garlands of red roses torn down from the marble walls of her dwelling to trail in the lust of desire and in the blood upon the floor." He got up, holding by the back of his chair. "I drew it—so help me God I did—to help Gough when he returned from Harimau, the Malayan Tigress, broken in body, broken in mind, broken in wealth." He turned on Day, suddenly, angrily. "There's your prize Nut for you, Squirrel—your Barcelona—your Cocoanut. Get to it, man. Get to it. Leave the flowers of the forest and—and the weeds of the ports alone and—and dig that damned tree up—up." He wrung his fine hands, wiped them on his coat. "Tear it up by the roots—burn it—burn it." He crossed to Day, swaying a little as he walked and looked down at him. "You talk of a virgin's raiment, Padre, but you—you allowed that virgin lad, Gough, that—that Joseph who'd—

who'd barely kissed a wench, to get into that devil's—that she-devil's claws——"

"I'll go to him to-night, Hicks. At once. I didn't know. I thought it was just gossip."

"Gossip be damned!" Hicks laughed, a sound like a deep-toned bell. He walked away into the shadows, took out his handkerchief and wiped his hands. They watched him, fear in their hearts and eyes. "Well, you'd better step on your going, old man, if you—if you want to get to the——" He pointed upwards, to the stars. "—to The Judgment Seat in time." He stood looking up, nodding his silvery head. "Basil Gough's up there—covered in—in—blood——" He hiccoughed and turned round, tears on his cheeks, looked at them and came back, stood there, holding to the archway.

"What *can* he mean?"

"What are you driving at, Hicks?"

Old Hiccoughs looked at them through the archway. "Gough blew his brains out this evening. Just—just before I came along to dine and make merry—make merry." He wiped his hands on his coat. "In front of the picture on the wall." He wagged a finger at Day. "His blood's spattered on that bitch's hands. There's a spot on her cheek. His life's blood. The roses trail in it. His. Get me, Day, damn you!" He laughed and walked away into the shadows, watched by the others, smitten dumb.

AN IMPRESSION OF TROUBLE.

Christine passed that milestone the day her mother crossed to the mainland, forgetting her keys. Ria found

them and took the jangling bunch to her young mistress who interviewed an overseer in her mother's absence.

Christine waited until the man should be through with what he had come about then climbed the stairs up which, thirteen years before, Elinor had made successive journeys with the cradle tied with used ribbon, the long-chair, the desk and the seaman's chest, all that had had to do with the sale which had taken the light from her eyes, the spring from her step and the joy from her heart.

The Bungalow had not been altered, had not been touched since that day, thirteen years before, or still further back when the Stills had arrived on The Island in all the hope and enthusiasm of their first try-out. The living-room was still the principal room on the ground floor with Elinor's big bedroom leading out of it. The guest's bedroom and Christine's bedroom were at the back, leading out of each other. Simple affairs with a tin-bath-in-the-corner arrangement attached. The attic or box-room ran right across the building under the flat roof.

This was packed with throw-outs. Things mildewed or insect-ridden. Trunks full of camphor-reeking stuffs. Junk funiture. All of which should have been destroyed but had not owing to the excessive frugality of Elinor's mind, an economic outlook bred of those hard times when she and Still had gamely lived from hand to mouth. As the clutter of discarded things under the old dust sheet should have been destroyed. For the peace of Elinor's mind. But they had not been destroyed. They lay where, eyes blazing, heart torn, she had thrown them, one after the other, one on top of the other into the corner. Where, thirteen years

later, Christine found them. She lifted a corner of the sheet which looked as though it covered something dead. Pulled the sheet off, frowned then turned and looked at the rest of the place with trunks in orderly rows and derelict furniture arranged tidily against the walls.

Under the sheet a cradle covered with old muslin and trimmed with rotting blue ribbon lay upside down on a battered seaman's chest. Over those, and also upside down, a rattan long-chair, its faded cushions under it. A work-basket on its side, the contents of wool and bobbins and something half knitted on long knitting needles, spilled over the floor. Two chairs. A jug and basin. A linen bundle. She knelt and undid the bundle. In it a nightdress, one of a set of stout, finely tucked garments belonging to her mother's one time attenuated trousseau. With it all sorts of towels and small baby clothes. She looked behind the seaman's chest. A bundle of sheets and blankets on the ground and reeking of camphor as the whole attic reeked of it. Up against the wall, a battered-looking, iron, double bedstead, its brass knobs gone black. The mattress and the pillows. Why? what had happened for everything to have been thrown away so untidily.

She gathered up the bobbins.

One rolled away from her. As though it had no wish to be touched again, after so many years of peace up there under the roof. The garment on the long needles was a baby's first woollie. She pressed it against her cheek. It had been intended for her twin brother and he had died. She got up and stood away, back from the tumbled heap. Her solitary life on The Island had taught her observation.

She had made a study of it to help pass hours sometimes over long.

"Why was it *thrown* down?"

She spoke out loud. The coolies' chanting answered her. The barking of a dog. The humming of a humming-bird. She watched the feathered jewel blown in at the window by the wind. It flashed from side to side, humming. It darted through the window and was gone whilst the dog barked angrily and the coolies chanted.

Might anger and not grief be the answer to her question? the reason for the furniture being flung pell-mell in a heap, into the corner? Grief had more than one way of dimming memory. It destroyed sometimes but more often hoarded or hid. But tidily, wrapping the memento carefully up, tying it with ribbon and putting it tenderly away. As her mother had tied every letter she had ever had from her father and put the little packets away in a tin-lined case. As she, herself, in growing older, had wrapped up a few trifles, in soft paper, tied them with pink ribbon, and stowed them safely somewhere.

And so neatly.

She touched a chair. It had been so roughly flung into the corner a leg had cracked. And the work-basket. Its contents spilled and the inside of the basket full of dust and bits. She ran the half knitted woollie up and down the needles. That, too. Thrown away. Not put away wrapped about with love and lavender. She lifted the long-chair and turned the cradle the right way up. Its impact with the lid of the chest had broken the hood. It caved inwards. A tiny pillow, edged with yellowing, rotting lace, fell out.

A tiny mattress. She picked the pillow up and laid her cheek against it. Was her mother's refusal to open the attic explained by the harshness with which the cradle had been flung into the corner? and did the refusal point to her mother being overwhelmed with something besides grief over her brother's death? Would it explain the want of love in her mother's eyes and voice for her daughter? A lack unexpressed by word or action but which made itself felt daily and hourly in a certain cold hostility.

Christine kissed the little pillow. Her twin brother must have imbibed all the mother love whilst waiting side by side with his sister in the mother womb. She shook her head. Anger at the loss of the longed for son might explain the rough handling of the cradle and the withholding of the key from the daughter who had survived the son but would it explain her mother's attitude towards the mound under the mango tree?

A heap kept tidy by the third gardener but not cared for in the least. Just as though the earth had been piled over an empty hole in the ground. As though it stood for a symbol of something which might have been.

But the son *had* been. Her Uncle David had brought him into the world. A quarter of an hour before herself. She closed her eyes at the thought of the time when she lay hid from the world and so close to her brother. She got up from her knees and looked into the chest. Empty. No, in a corner lay a begrimed bit of wool. She took it out. A toy. A parrot which had once been white. And almost pulled to pieces. One beady, black eye gone. The other dim with dust. She rubbed it. The boot-button eye seemed

to sparkle, to wink as though over some good joke known only to itself. Perhaps over the reason for the toy having been pulled to bits.

Was there a mystery surrounding their birth?

There could not be. Her Uncle David had told her all about it. Of the frightful storm or, rather, the typhoon, the arrival of her father's friend called Bramly Lowth, the accident to her father.

Bramly Lowth?

The multi-millionaire? Would the trouble she sensed be connected in any way with him? No, he had shown himself indeed a true friend. He had stood by her mother through thick and thin. Her Uncle David had told her all about that, too. Bramly Lowth had selected the site of the mango grove and had seen to the burial of her brother forgetting, as her mother had forgotten, that in the absence of a priest he could have baptised the dying child. Later he had sent his head man over to The Island to straighten things out and replant the top of it. Had waited for her father to recover from the operation and then had gone home, and after some years, three or four, had written Aunt Janey to say that, his wife childless and past the age of child-bearing, he had adopted a son to inherit his great fortune and many business enterprises. She discarded Bramly Lowth, as one dashes past the sign which warns of the concealed turning, and sat down on the long-chair. Where Elinor had sat as she pulled the parrot to bits thirteen years ago. Would she tell her mother of this visit to the attic? Deciding not to she pushed the cradle back against the double bed, turned the long-chair over

the chest, arranged the jug and basin and bundle of linen near it and covered it all up again with the dust-sheet. At sight of Grannie Dindings downstairs, in her stout tussore suiting and battered sun-helmet, she held the woollie and the parrot behind her, pecked the old body on both cheeks, ordered tea and went away to inspect the guest-room. That done she hid her treasure-trove under her own pillow and returned to entertain the old dame until the others arrived.

Elinor came back with Day and Hicks. The two first full of the tragedy of the picture on the wall, the old fellow in the throes of sobering up after the outsize bout of the night before and into which genuine grief had plunged him. They climbed to The Look-Out before sunset and turned the telescope there along Johore's coast. Nothing to be seen. Not even a plume of smoke near the confines of the jungle to indicate where Harimau, the harlot, dwelt in The Village of The Bulls.

"Leave it to me." Great voice booming, head splitting, Hicks sat down. "I'll manage an introduction for you somehow, Squirrel. I'll get you a chance of snaffling your Cocoanut. My God my head! But it may take time. Months. Years. O Lord my head! And think of the damage that beast'll do by then." He closed his aching eyes. "Tell you what. We'll each tackle one end of the rope. I'll try out on the tiger and you keep a look-out for tiger-hunters. Those young feller-me-lads like that youngster Gough just gone west. Out after beige 'tiger' with two legs, a damned crimson mouth and bloody, I beg the

ladies' pardon, claws." He got up and bowed when Christine got up to go down, solicitous for the guests' welfare.

The elders sat on, talking about her. Hicks, brain hopping like a fire-ball in its pan, suggested leaving her to grow up. Grannie Dindings, accustomed to young things and also to bossing, urged Elinor to send the girl to school.

"Shoulder rubbing is what the chit wants, my dear."

Elinor nodded, grey eyes like slate, one capable, hard hand spread masterfully in her unyielding lap, the other pressed against the breast which had not suckled this girl child of hers. She had never loved her daughter. Had never been able to feel anything but dislike for her. She was a symbol of the prosperity about them, an affluence bought through the terrible sale of her man-child all those years ago. The sale of the son for whom she had edged the little pillow in the attic with lace, tied the faded ribbon to the cradle, waited for the exquisite moment when she should feed him at her breast.

That sinful bargain.

It had all been so simple. So very simple. A touch of hemp under the baby boy's nails and he as dead. In a great heat when burial follows death as quickly as one minute the other. The mock funeral and then Bramly Lowth off to the mainland, the drugged baby wrapped in a rug. Nothing easier. And nothing easier than what must have happened later. The child, her son, put out to nurse in the native quarter where the illegitimate offspring of both colours and the half-caste results of mixing both colours, could be nursed for a sum big enough to buy the foster-mother's silence.

Silence, secrecy, backsheesh. Everything underhand, then the child sent home in charge of someone who offered her services for the fare.

Lowth wrote once a year. A letter Elinor learned by heart and burned. The boy was strong, intelligent and good-looking. A credit to his school, the name of the school withheld. He was happy. Her son was happy. Hers. And here half Singapore worrying itself to fiddlestrings over her daughter's vapourings. She had never been able to stand Christine. Her father had never forgiven her for surviving when his son, as he had believed, had died. It would be good to get her to school. Off The Island for a while. Out of her sight. If she could. Could she? The girl had a will of iron under her gentleness. She was not the daughter of her father for nothing.

"I have no influence over her," she said to the others. "You, David, are the only one she takes any notice of."

They talked the matter over, threshed it out and decided it would be best to leave the task of persuading Christine to her Uncle David, the little man who had brought her into the world.

AN IMPRESSION OF POWER.

It took two years to persuade Christine and at fifteen she was by no means the kind of proposition you clasp to your bosom at sight. She was reticent though others called her shy. The staff adored her, the female servants discussing her threadbare morning, noon and night. So

did the males for that matter until Ria told them to mind their own business. Which they did, behind closed doors.

The young visitors shied violently at her and finding less and less entertainment in her and in her mother who vetoed mixed bathing in the light of the moon, voted The Island amongst the wash-outs. The older visitors soon discovered she tolerated neither advice nor sermon. For two years she fought the question of schooling. What could matter a date the more, the less? or a knowledge of the principal rivers of Europe? when coolies and servants came to her for advice and business men talked business with her. At least the innocent thought they sought her to talk business whereas her extreme youth and beauty, splendid brain, excessive reserve and radiant future drew them to The Island.

She discussed everything with Day whom she had never called The Squirrel. Talked quite openly of her brother with him. Of the attic. The disorder there. Showed him her woollen finds. Told him about her love of beautiful clothes and showed him the contents of her wardrobe. "You see this, Uncle darling?" The this a ribbon shoulder-strap to an embroidered nightdress. "I always hope I shall wake up one night and see the spirit of my twin standing by my bed." She unfastened one end of the strap. "You see? it hooks and I always leave it undone because I hope one night I may feel my brother fastening it up for me." She put the garment down and slipped her arm in Day's. "I used to think he was alive and that I should meet him some day but I know, now, of course, that I shall only see his spirit when he does come." She laid her beautiful

head against Day's tussore shoulder. "A twin brother could come and tuck one up and kiss one good-night couldn't he? and there'd be nothing to stop a twin brother from fastening a shoulder-strap, would there?"

Day said that nothing could stand between any twin brother and his sister's shoulder-strap but was of the private opinion that it was indeed high time Christine started rubbing shoulders with normal girls of her own age and somewhat older. They fought the question out. He won. Christine, sighing woefully, said she would try and endure one year's intensive 'finishing' at the capable hands of the Misses Pring and Prong of Singapore. She tried to wangle out of it at the very last moment, her excuse the epidemic ravaging the East at the moment. Something sudden, subtle and deadly but neither bubonic nor influenza. Certainly the Peninsular had so far escaped but one never could tell and to her mind an ozone drenched island would prove an unsurmountable barrier to the most persistent microbe.

Day proved adamant. She gave in and wilfully refusing his escort left The Island in the swiftest motorboat after a none too demonstrative farewell with her mother.

At the door of her college bedroom she stopped, eyed the two beds, eyed the Misses Pring and Prong.

"I have never shared a room," she said simply. "I never will. I have often slept on a mat on the verandah and I don't mind sleeping on one of the corridor mats until you can make other arrangements but I can't share a room."

Mesdames Pring and Prong overstepped the boundary of their authority. They were not to be dictated to by

anyone, let alone a new pupil even if she did figure largely upon the list of really lucrative parents. They had nothing else to offer and dear Mr. Day had been perfectly satisfied with the arrangement of the curtain down the middle of the room. Noises? Night noises? They did not understand. What? *What?* Certainly not! Edith Evans had never had anything more nasal the matter with her than a slight catarrh. They drew themselves up. Christine ordered Ria to find coolies for her luggage and walked out of the house.

Ombak, the serang, saw her coming from afar off. He leapt ashore, dashed up a side street, flung down coin, grabbed a handful of Garlands-of-Meeting-and-Parting and got back just in time to fling them over Christine's head after which he rushed her up the gangway as though he were afraid she might turn and run away again.

When one of the crew doubled up suddenly and turned on his face and died the Serang rushed Christine to the bows and ordered her to stay there. The dead man he had lifted on oars and thrown into the sea, the oars with him. At the sound of lamentation from The Island he ordered Christine to stay where she was.

"It is the plague, Little Mistress," he said, standing in front of her, arms outstretched as though to protect her from the menace. "It must have struck our Island. And behold! Upon the shore stands the *a-jar a-jar,* the thrice blessed holy man."

"——and so suddenly, my dear child." Day patted Christine's hand. "Your dear mother had only time to

leave you a message, uncompleted, alas, before she passed on."

"What was the message?"

" 'Tell Christine she has a——' " Day patted her shoulder as they reached the gangway. "I expect your mother, my very dear and lamented friend, was referring to the responsible position you are to hold from now on, my dear. As owner and mistress supreme of Hope Island. The many souls upon it in your good keeping." He turned to the watching crew, to Ria close to Ombak, to the men and women crowding the quay. "God has gathered your Mistress to her forefathers," he said and put his hand on Christine's shoulder. "Behold your Mistress."

The sound of men shouting reached the wailing women in the house as Christine, garlanded and grave, passed through the ranks of her kneeling servants.

MIDWAY.

CHRISTINE.

Four years later Singapore was up in arms, a militancy due to the advent of a stranger in its midst, and the elders of the City ready to kick themselves, a figurative acrobatic sacred to those who have or think they have been stung.

The Peninsular knew all there was to know about Christine, or thought it did. It had watched her through two of life's stipulated stages, babyhood and childhood. Women envied her. Married men admired her. Bachelors, with a leaning to matrimony, angled for her. Parents had their eye upon her. Was she not witty and wise and very good to look at? her fortune of the type to make the mouth water for your son? her name to be conjured with in a good deal more than the deflated rubber market?

Still, of Hope Island.

The chit of a girl!

Gay, in a grave, quiet way, Christine had become a year after her mother's death. Smiling, too, though one rarely heard her laugh. Governing her domain with a velvet-gloved hand, through which she allowed the iron occasionally to be felt, she had set about improving The Island. She enlarged the house for a start. Added two

wings at right angles to the main building then, clearing the attics, burning the junk, removing the derelict furniture under the sheet to her own rooms on the ground floor, added a storey, roofing it with a roof-garden calculated to withstand 'weather.' The old living-room became a centre hall. Her mother's big bedroom she divided into two which she made her own. Her guests she slept in the upper storeys of both wings. A cove on the south coast became a swimming-pool, the tennis courts were covered in and the lower rooms of both wings given over entirely to the comfort and indoor entertainment of her week-end visitors.

A vegetarian because she could not bear the thought of anything being slain to help her live she kept two cooks. Her own Malay and for her friends the illegitimate issue of a Tamil cake-maker and a French chef.

A prohibitionist, an austere streak inherited from both parents, she worried over her guest's cellar. Had one made below sea level. A dim and vinous cave which added to the bottle the misty bloom of the grape.

Because of all that but more because of her seductive grave gaiety, her invitations were sought for. In fact you were not considered in the swim if you failed to bathe once in a while in the cove to the south.

Quick upon her mother's death women of all kinds, creeds and credential had offered themselves as chaperone. She had thought the Early Victorian proposition out, as she weighed all things thoroughly, from the compradore's suggestion of starting a small tinning factory to use up the superfluous fruit which otherwise rotted on branch or ground, the advisability of using iron instead of wooden

stakes to the young trees, thereby scotching the rubber pest which throve on rotting wood, to the more intimate and far more difficult task of forbidding 'Fish-Fighting' amongst the Malay women in the servant quarters.

'FISH-FIGHTING.'

A beastly sport.

One with the cock-fighting and bull-fighting on the mainland towards the jungle it had evidently been resorted to only recently on The Island. She had come to know of it quite by chance, the servants remaining in happy ignorance of her knowledge of their entertainments after working hours.

Laughter and applause had taken her over to the tool-house west of the Jacob Plantation one night. About to enter to see what the fun was all about, the chink of money had stopped her. She had turned away. Her servants were at liberty to gamble until cockcrow if they liked so long as they paid their debts bi-annually. A woman's laughing words had taken her back to the window.

"It dies!" the laughing voice had cried to the clashing of bracelets. "Aha, it is dead!"

What had died? what had been done to death in the tool-house? Pushing the cotton curtain, loosely pinned across the window, she looked in.

A young Malay, fine eyes, fine teeth flashing, held a Fighting-Fish up on the end of her silver hairpin. In a big glass bowl on a high table two Fighting-Fish, minute

monsters with goggling eyes, and mouths enormous compared to their small bodies, fought to the death. They lashed the water with diminutive tail and tore at each other with gaping mouth. Four, in shreds, lay dead on the table. One, *hors de combat* because of its frightful wounds, leapt convulsively until it leapt off the table to the floor where it leapt, unnoticed, to die under someone's foot.

Christine had tip-toed away. The brutal pastime had been the Malay woman's sport for centuries. Though long since out of fashion amongst the better classes it was still a Malay custom and, as such, difficult for a Christian and a foreigner to tackle, to forbid. Having thought the problem over for days she had put it on one side until her Uncle David's next visit.

THE BARRIER.

The chaperone question she decided for herself, after studying from all angles the offers of the women who seemed so suddenly smitten with a desire to look after her. Her moral welfare, of course, her financial status being as firmly established as her unique reputation for business. And what if she had only just turned eighteen? what on earth had years to do with the discretion of an honest young woman? Except for her inexplicable longing for the brother, dead these eighteen years, she was perfectly normal, soberly inclined and therefore compared somewhat favourably with many of those who desired to watch over her. Running through the letters from grass and bona-fide widows, free lances and spinsters of all

ages, ignoring Grannie Dindings and Janet Grant, both of whom plumped for antiquated propriety, she turned the proposition down and, that through with, gathered her best friends together and gave the first of her subsequent bi-monthly week-end parties from which everything acid, narrow-minded or illegitimately skittish was excluded.

Men had proposed to her and still did, hope being harder to root out of male than female breast. The reason of their love welled from three sources, herself, The Island and her heartening banking account, but they all came to the conclusion that she was as difficult of approach as The Island on the wrong wind. Ombak, the serang, might get you skilfully into harbour in all weathers but nothing seemed to get one past the barrier of Christine's reserve. They tried to propose. She skilfully sidetracked them. They did propose. She shook her head.

Her seeming distaste for marriage made one of Singapore's favourite subjects of conversation. The servants discussed it threadbare but Ria put an intuitive finger on the reason for it. " 'The moon is only rounded to perfection at her full,' " she quoted the day young Dawson packed and left in a hurry. "When our Mistress finds a half perfect enough to replace the half buried under the mango tree then will she wed." And when Sunyi asked her to marry him, Wives One and Two divorced by the simple process of telling them, one bright morning, that they were divorced, she shook her head. Nothing would make her leave her young Mistress in her maiden state. When Christine married she would wed Sunyi and he,

with the permission of their Excellencies Grant, would then come as head house 'boy' to The Island.

A vow which seemed to doom Ria to perpetual and sterile spinsterhood.

Two years passed.

Two gay years which saw Christine still unwed and Molly and Billy home again. Billy straight from Harrow, having cut Oxford the sooner to be in business with his father. Molly straight from the finishing school, having cut the last year there to be the sooner with Billy. They seemed inseparable. Uncannily so their fellow passengers on the boat out had thought. Singapore laughed and took the two in one to its heart. Christine loved them and endured the sight of them together as best she was able.

She had failed to find an explanation to fit her unceasing longing for her brother. As was to be expected, there being no one left to tell her that he lived and that alive, and through the bond which held them, he pulled her from the West as she pulled him from the East.

She listened patiently to Billy's enthusiastic description of a fellow called Christopher Strong, one year his senior at Harrow. To how Strong had captained the School at Lords, had put up a jolly good fight at Bisley and would most certainly have made a name with the gloves had he only been obliged to work for a living instead of being a millionaire's heir, and a millionaire himself since the death of his father.

"Christopher! Christopher Strong!" Christine repeated the name the first time she heard it. "It almost makes a pair with mine."

"So it does. Christine Still and Christopher Strong."

"Yes, and you'll be meeting him, one day, Chris. Billy says he's sure to stray out here as his father, you know, the one Mums and Dads used to know, I've forgotten his name—what?—oh, yes, Bramly Lowth, was out here such a lot." Molly, arm round Billy, laughed. "And he'll immediately fall in love with you as every man in the Peninsular and Archipelago and other such holes and corners seems to fall for you, Chris." She pressed her cheek against Billy's. "You won't fall in love with Chris, will you Billy? I simply couldn't bear you to fall in love with anyone."

"Not the slightest danger, Kid." Laughing, Billy had kissed his pretty sister. "You are the love of my heart, and the desire of my life is to——"

"No, Billy, no! never! I won't let you!" Distraught Molly, leaping to her feet, had pointed to the mainland wrapped in mist. "Billy wants to go after tiger, Chris. It's too dreadful. Out there. Over there to the north of Johore."

Christine, of the opinion that as he would not go on 'shikari' by himself Billy would be perfectly safe, had suggested climbing to The Look Out the better to see the lay of tiger-land. The silver stream seen through the telescope was Tiger Stream and when her guests were energetically inclined and the weather fine she took them over for a picnic day, coming back by the stars or moon. She laughed when Billy suggested picnicking forthwith. On the morrow.

"It'll be full moon and I might be able to make plans." He had urged. "I was a better shot than Strong, you know, and the men at the Club say there's plenty of tiger-spoor to be picked up near a place called The Village of The Bulls."

"Tiger-cat, Hudson called it, Bill. A tiger, Chris, everyone seems to have been dying to pot, trap or something final for ever so long."

Looking from Billy to Molly Christine had held her peace. There was not the slightest chance of Billy meeting Harimau, The Tiger, the harlot of the Malay. That being so there would be no earthly good in warning him, none in rousing even the shadow of curiosity in him or of fear in Molly's heart.

Had she, would it have made the slightest difference? to the twins? seeing that the path of each of us, harlots included, is supposed to have been marked out from the beginning, it probably would not.

In a curious form of self-inflicted torture Christine gave the twins free run of The Island. They came. They went. Played tennis, bathed, fished and danced. Did exactly as they liked. Sometimes she was there, sometimes not. Nor were they to know that when she was not there it was because she could no longer endure the sight of them together. That she hid. Sometimes to watch them from behind a curtain. To spy upon their happiness in being with each other. To sit and brood and revile the gods for having taken her other half from her.

CHRISTOPHER.

A year later Christopher Strong arrived in Singapore and the reason the elders of the City were bitten with a desire to kick themselves was because, although the adopted son of Bramly Lowth, they knew nothing at all about him. Such slackness. Such want of forethought. Any amount of them had been home on leave, furlough or holiday and not one had had the sense to look up Lowth and so learn something about the adopted heir who would be bound to visit the East one day.

Too late now.

Two years back Lowth had passed to the realm where those who make their pile too soon and retire too soon, do pass.

And here his son. Adopted from some home. Foundling Home. Which? The elders put it to Grannie Dindings. An authority as it were on foundlings, their habitat and habits, she, if anyone, should be able to pick up a clue.

That got the old dame's back up, a none too difficult or infrequent matter.

"There is as much difference between the Occidental and Oriental foundling," she snapped, "as there is between what the Singapore set takes to be the latest things in hats and what is, in Paris." Unable to rake up Strong's ancestry, verminous curiosity gnawing their vitals, they urged her to do her best with the skipper of the boat on which the young fellow had come out. Grannie consented. Getting on board offered no difficulty, her years, caustic tongue and good heart having obtained her the entré to

most ships in port plus any free meal for which she might hanker. And what she wangled out of the old man at tiffin she promised to relay to her cronies at tea.

The quartermaster saw her coming and fled to report the menace in the offing to someone in authority. The third officer wrote a hurried line and rushed the q.m. to the saloon where the old man endured tiffin with those left on board to spoil it for him.

"Too late," he scrawled upon the menu. "In ten minutes from the time she's tied up to the table send word I'm wanted in the crow's-nest or somewhere closed to females and why the devil don't you keep a better look-out?"

He rose to the stout tussore suiting and battered sun-helmet. Offered her the entire wine list in a vain hope that a stream of stimulant down her throat might serve to stem the question-flood upon her lips. Oh, that was it. Strong, Christopher Strong was the motive power behind the surprise visit. No, he'd never met Lowth but he understood the young fellow to be his adopted son. Look like? Oh, the goods and no mistake. Lots of fair hair, grey eyes, a chest expansion and a jaw which was a jaw and dovetailed perfectly into his prohibition tendencies. The skipper smote the table. Would she believe it, the feller neither smoked nor drank. On principle, too. On board a tropic bound ship. Did he know anything about the feller's early days? Nothing worth speaking about. Accomplishments and parlour tricks apparently nil but she should have seen him with the gloves. Aim? Ambition? Would the woman never stop?

"Research work's his hobby, Mam. Chasing the microbe

to its intestinal lair. The Far Eastern microbe. Beri-beri, elephantiasis, bubonic and all their kin. He's got no need to work being a millionaire and then some but he's come out East to look for a site on which to build an international laboratory. Outdoing Rockefeller in benefiting mankind. That's his stunt, aim, ambition, Mam, and I'll tell you something that'll make Singapore simply foam." He whispered behind his hand. "He's heard of that Monte Cristo Island, you know, Hope Island, and's got his eye on it for his lab." He read the message demanding his immediate presence in the cook's galley and got up. He was exceedingly sorry to leave her but the cook seemed to be in the soup over some culinary matter. Would she consider the ship completely at her disposal from bridge to scupper. He excused himself and Grannie, having weighed straight through the menu, went on deck where she found a garrulous female anchored to the ship with a ricked ankle.

"We've had a perfect plague of women on board," said this one, "and the only man worth a second thought passed his time reading up for something with the doctor. All the voyage. And such an Adonis. You can take it from me that there wasn't a woman from the scraggy stewardess Simes to the stout Honourable Susan who didn't suffer cardiac whim-whams over him." She pulled at the home-knitted, canary-coloured abomination which covered her sparse and sinewy torso. She suffer from cardiac whim-whams? Dear me, *no*. She was a clergyman's widow and clerical repression was still strong upon her. No, Mr. Strong had not talked about himself but of course every-

one knew he was the adopted son of Bramly Lowth, the millionaire. Oh, yes, he'd been at some public school or another and had given up the varsity because of his leanings for research work. Yes, tropical diseases. Those horrid things one saw in the Bazaars when he might have tried out on a simple cold in the head at home.

She sneezed.

A favourite with children? Oh, not at all. Except for making them sick with the sweets he bought for them by the ton he had taken no notice of the pests, as most millionaires or well known or notorious people did when there was a camera in the offing. Side? not a bit. Just bound up in his scheme which would be financed entirely by himself. To think of it, he and the doctor up half the night talking microbe and many a young thing out for the first time, and others not so young or unsophisticated, dying to be conducted to the bows for a glimpse of The Southern Cross which most could see perfectly well through the port.

Grannie exchanged gossip and cigarettes whilst Strong enquired for mail at The Europe. Nothing? Of course. Changing his plans and his ship at Colombo he had forgotten to advise his shipping agents that he intended getting off at Singapore instead of Hongkong. "My mail's en route for China by now and if Mr. Grant, junior, calls send him up. I only wirelessed him my change of plans just as we berthed." He moved to one side as Hicks, throat a kiln, pockets bare, on the scent of a free drink and, with luck, a meal gratis attached to it, stretched for a pen.

"Excuse me, sir, for butting in," said Hicks, "but if I can be of any service to you pray command me. You are a stranger here and therefore more than likely to be taken in. My name is Hickory Hicks. I am one of Singapore's oldest residents and have the honour of counting the Grants amongst my best and dearest friends."

People turned to listen to the beautiful, cultured voice. Strong, quite wise to the signs of waste under the snow-white hair, put out his hand. He was delighted. He hoped a friend of the Grants would be a friend of his. And what about tiffin? he was simply ravenous. So was Hicks. For something in a glass.

"May I suggest a light *apéritif?*" Hicks used the word advisedly as being a good deal more formal than the festive cocktail. "What! *You don't drink!* How on earth do you expect to pull out in the East if you don't *drink.*" Shaking his patriarchal head he held out his hand again. "You must be Christopher Strong," he boomed. "Outside missionaries, who're neither quite human nor normal of course, Singapore wots of no prohibitionist, male or female, but everyone has heard of Bramly Lowth's adopted son's teetotal tendencies." He clasped Strong's hand, wrung it. He would not let it go and shook his head at the suggestion of having the cocktail on his own whilst the other went up to his room to see what it was like. "What! you haven't been up? but my dear fellow you mustn't take the first thing the East hands you. That stands for being stung. I'll show you. Allow me to accompany you though of course the Grants'll shift you to Latex Villa directly they know you're here." Discarding the shadowy cocktail

for the substance of a free meal he hooked his arm in Strong's and went upstairs with him to the big, shady room overlooking the square. "And I'd advise tiffin up here as your fellow passengers'll disrupt into the lounge with all the junk they've bought."

An hour later his jaded appetite pecked about amongst the dishes whilst Strong took notes of the best way to get to Hope Island. It seemed indeed the very site for his building scheme. Surrounded by ozone. Free from interruption. Governed or, rather, owned by a girl who of course would be only too glad to let it go for the substantial sum he was prepared to offer for it. In fact should the place really suit he was ready to meet her in every way. And he wanted to get on with it. To get started. At once, after the manner of those with money to burn. The laboratory once built others would be able to begin their work for the benefit of mankind whilst he continued his studies. He clasped his strong hands. Set his jaw. He had not been plucked from some foundling home for nothing. He was positive of that. The Almighty had chosen him as a tool to be moulded into an instrument for the welfare of others. He propounded his scheme at length, his missionary blood, the root of his prohibitionary principles, of the same in Christine, of a certain hard streak in both of them, stirring. The statistics from death by tropical disease were simply appalling and each year seemed to add some new microbe to the list of those already known and still unscotched. That being so, why wait to start building until he should be fully qualified to join the scientists here and at home?

Hope Island.

He wrote the name on the top of the map he had drawn and passed it to Hicks. He nodded. That was it. As near it as a cocktail was to a long drink. He followed the outline with the prong of a fork and laughed stupidly when the steel perforated The Island in the middle.

"Christine won't sell. Day—Squirrel parson y'know ——" He yawned, sleepy from a plurality of free drinks. "—'d tell you the 'dentical thing. He—he c'lects nuts f'r a—a living—but there's no—no may in th' Malay." He shook his muzzy head. "—give you m'word on—that." He stretched for his glass which Strong, in the austerity of his convictions, longed to snatch back. "—but y'can try." He laughed, the beautiful sound like the ringing of a bell in a mist. "—but you take m'tip an' put the brake on, slam it on—hard." He sat up very straight. "Ev'ry man's after th' lass for her—her looks or her—her money-bags —so if you slam on th' glad-eye—the glad brake p'raps she'll—yes——" He giggled. "—maybe she'll give you th' Island—this—this—s'Hope Island."

Strong beckoned the waiter who in a whisper put him wise to the Tuan Ol' Ik's vagaries. He led the sleepy old fellow downstairs, ensconced him in a deep armchair safe from reproving eye, ran upstairs, and collected what he thought he might want for a day or so. Pandemonium met him on the steps. The outraged commissionaire plus his underlings remonstrated in the dust with the driver of a car who endeavoured to extricate the driver of a bullock-cart and a rickshaw coolie from the splinters of their respective vehicles. A pirate driver beckoned Strong,

skipped off the seat and held the door invitingly open whilst the registered hotel drivers told him exactly what they thought of his poaching. The car slipped away in the clamour and, the side flaps down, Billy failed to see Strong as they passed each other in a cloud of dust.

"Who did Mr. Strong have tiffin with?"

"With the Tuan Ol' Ik, sir." The waiter waved an expressive hand towards the wine list.

Billy ran downstairs and shook Old Hiccoughs partly awake. "Where's Strong gone to?" he said.

"S'Hope," the shameless old fellow gurgled and fell asleep again, a hazy slumber from which there would be no waking until the passing of the alcoholic fog.

"Soap! it's your head under a tap you mean." Billy, perturbed, went to make enquiries of the commissionaire who enquired of his underlings. No, the gentleman in question had not been seen on the steps. The registered drivers, intent upon snaffling some part of the sight-seeing swarm, had no time to waste on explanation.

"Perhaps Mr. Strong has gone shopping, sir," suggested the manager. "Frayed collars owing to Chinese laundering on board. You, sir, will know what that stands for."

Billy thought that quite unlikely. Would the manager ring Latex Villa as soon as his friend returned?

Janet was more than perturbed. The ports were no place for a wealthy young man, and one known to be wealthy, to get lost in. Grant laughed. But he did not laugh when, quite late, the Europe rang to say that the gentleman in question had not returned. With Molly and Billy he drove down to make enquiries. The manager

spread suave hands. It was Mr. Strong's first visit to the East. Might not curiosity be the explanation of his absence with hand luggage. He bowed them out and affected to ignore the booking-clerk's knowing lowered eye-lid.

TWO MISTAKES.

Strong sat in the bows watching The Island on which he had been born.

It showed a dusky patch, a mound, a hill, an emerald cone set in a sea turned into a coloured patchwork by the clouds. The mainland to port. To starboard three great Chinese junks going from here to there. He looked astern. Nothing. They had made the point.

He looked still further back. Into the past. Nothing outstanding there. He put his intense satisfaction in the East down to his joy in being able to start so soon upon his scheme for benefiting mankind. He made a point of it when he talked about the attraction the East held and had always held for him.

He believed it.

There was no one to tell him that he was a half, a twin.

Nothing to tell him that his sister lived and was pulling him across the world to her.

The question of the laboratory had evolved through a succession of minor events connected with his boyhood. He had been known as Strong, The Silent, to his friends and Strong, The Stubborn, to the more gregarious who had roughed up against his excessive reserve. His missionary blood had plagued him from the beginning. Pass-

ing through youth's religious phase he had pestered Lowth with prayers to be allowed to throw everything to the four winds and start out as lay missionary in the foreign field.

Lowth, the wise man, voicing an 'all in good time' had hit on research work as a substitute for the foreign mission and, desk covered with statistics, had casually outlined a scheme for building an institution to benefit both the white and foreign races. Had described a laboratory to be built in England, the East being already cluttered with such altruistic concerns, and as he outlined the plan had looked at the boy he loved so and whose purchase he had not once regretted.

Elinor Still's son.

So like her in her teens. When he had first met her working with her father in Mongolia and miles away from the Malay. A none too easy problem this boy of hers. Immovable once set on a course. A passable scholar he had ploughed to the top of his form over and over again and by sheer imperturbability had lived down the laughter roused by his distaste for anything out of bounds.

He should have been a prig. He was anything but.

"Strong's a solitary," his house master had said when discussing him with the Head. He was, and, introspective, as was Christine, felt convinced his love for solitude and his failure to find a Jonathan to his David must be caused by something lacking in himself. What, he could not have told you. He tried to fill the vacuum with study, reading, sport. He tried to find the Jonathan. Failing to, because Christine pulled him from the other side of the world, he had turned to religion for which Lowth had cleverly substituted research work.

Banking on quite another score of years in which to take an active part in everyday matters and to shape his adopted son's future to his own ends, and that in spite of a game heart, Lowth made two mistakes.

Arbitrarily forbidding the building of the laboratory in the East he put his foot down so firmly about it he roused the boy's curiosity, started him thinking.

The institution would be built in England. Perhaps somewhere near the docks from which so many cases of tropical disease were sent to hospital. Right. Why not England and the docks? But why such insistence? What was the matter with the East of which the man who had adopted him had been such a shining light? He seemed as downright and mulish over this as he had always shown himself about the home from which his adopted son had been taken. No one had ever learned about the home. He, himself, had been told that his parents were honest, physically fit and morally sound but who they were, of what status, profession or trade and of which part of the country or world he had never learned.

Lowth had put a stop to the enquiries quite simply. He had informed the vicar that where he, himself, was satisfied there was no reason for others to interfere.

But the stubbornness about the laboratory seemed a different matter. What was wrong with the East? Having made his name and fortune and so many friends out there why should the millionaire seem so set against his adopted son going out? No matter. There was a fellow called Grant, from the Malay or some part of the Middle East, due for the House next term. He might be able to get

something out of him about the mysterious Orient and its seeming strong influence over even hard-headed business men.

BRAMLY LOWTH.

Fear had driven Lowth to forbid his adopted son the East.

Fear of Christine.

There was little chance of her brother meeting her even should he step off at Singapore on his way to the Far East. Singapore was more of a port of call than a place of residence to tourist or traveller. All the same he wished the boy had not so closely resembled Elinor Still in her teens, even if no one in Singapore had chanced to meet her in her youth. He could see her now in the dim, bare room. Could hear the howling wind and the clock striking. How like the boy was to her in her extremity. So fair. Such steady, grey eyes. So firm a mouth. To keep his secret safe he had never enlarged upon the East to the boy and on retiring had dropped his intermittent correspondence with the Grants.

For fear of Christine.

He had been sorry about that. He never saw clothes on a line or a scarecrow in a field without thinking of Ann Elliott, nor fail to connect the beauty of Hickory Hick's voice with the sweet tones of his own Temple gong. No matter. The boy must be safely anchored in the West and the way to bring that about would be to make quite sure all his interests lay on this side of the world.

And another idea.

A codicil to weight the anchor. Forbidding his adopted son the East. Leaving his vast fortune to certain charities should the lad ever go east of Suez. A stringent measure perhaps but necessary to safeguard the name for integrity and honest dealing he had made for himself out there and which he had wiped out, as one wipes chalk from a slate, by his infamous deal.

He had bought an only son. Had insisted upon the deal being carried through in spite of the entreaties of the helpless mother on her bed, the twins at her breast. A woman in childbirth at his mercy. At the mercy of a half-wit native nurse. Shameful. Disgraceful when one came to analyse it. Yes, he would make the codicil. His adopted son was strong willed and prone to kick against restraint but no young man would be fool enough to choose a life of drudgery when there were millions to be had for the cost of a little self-control. A score of times he had intended adding the codicil. He made the mistake of putting it off. He never added it.

A week later Strong had rung up to ask if he might bring a fellow called Grant back with him for the exeat.

"His people know you, sir. He's been telling me about his twin sister, Molly, and a placed called Hope Island owned by someone called Christine Still. Awfully like mine, isn't it? The name I mean, what? I've been telling him about the lab. Of course I know you're dead set against the East as a building site but he says if we could get the owner, this girl, to part with the place, with Hope Island, it'd make a simply topping spot to build on. Healthy, too." He laughed, his voice so young and en-

thusiastic. "Kind of show I should say where every prospect pleases including the human element. May I bring him down, sir? What? Grant. Yes, Billy Grant. His people are called John and Janet. Yes. Hello! Hello——"

There had been no reply.

Blue about the mouth, huddled with a raking pain Lowth had let the receiver drop. Hope Island. A spectre materialised out of the past. The Grants. Their son in his boy's House. No, impossible. Fantastic. Nothing could waken in Christopher the love, amounting to an obsession, of one twin for another. The boy had been a few hours old when he had been taken away from The Island. He had no knowledge of his twin sister. He had no idea that he was just a half. A twin. But what of the rest of the time? The pre-natal time? Nine months side by side with his sister under the mother's heart. And no one could tell with twins. They were uncanny. One died and from the moment of death the other, perhaps in another country, would begin to pine until it, too, died. What if something did waken in Christopher? The sense of loneliness he had talked over with his house master had been, of course, nothing but the calling of his twin from the other side of the world.

Ah, the pain! the pain!

What if young Grant sent a photograph home to his people and they saw the likeness to Elinor Still?

Ah, the terrible, the raking pain!

He could hear the boy's voice. So young. So fresh. And so solitary a lad because of Christine Still of Hope Island.

"Are you there, sir?"

He was not. He had been called before the Judge to render account of the sale, the terrible bargain.

THE LIKENESS.

The Serang gave the wheel over and went on deck.

"My name is Ombak, Tuan," he said in an English too involved to be inscribed. "I remember your Excellency's face perfectly but your Excellency's name has escaped me." He salaamed, fine teeth flashing.

"My face?" Strong looked up, the setting sun full on him. "But you can't remember my face. This is my very first visit to the Malay, in fact to the East.

Ombak backed a step. How astounding were the white races with their complicated way of living and their secrecy over trifles such as where they had or had not been. The Tuan Ol' Ik. There was a one for you! Not for anything on earth would he, when sober in Singapore, confess to passing one half of his time in the dilapidated Bungalow near The Village of The Bulls. Not even when you met him coming from The Village in one of the creaking bullock carts, prone on the floor nine times out of ten, as he lay prone over the wheel of the battered motor-launch he owned and used between what was known as Harimau Harbour and The Island. And now this one. Denying his identity with the sun full on his handsome face. Of course he was fair. There certainly was that to it. Fair of hair and skin and with light eyes. Like two out of three of his race, both male and female.

Yes, perhaps that was it.

He had made a mistake. He saw so many white men round and about the quay and town. But, no! There *was* something familiar in the direct eyes? Yes. No. It was in the turn of the head. But was it? Well, why worry? It was said that all Malays looked exactly alike to the white races and certainly the Malay saw little to distinguish one foreigner from another. Yes, that was it. He had mistaken some white characteristic for a likeness. Anyway, and praise be to Allah, the foreigner was of the courteous, charming type and, so rumour had it, of an immense wealth which his easy way with money undoubtedly proved. No counting the change to the last 'satu duit' or even to the half of a cent whilst endeavouring to get the maximum coolie labour for the minimum price.

"Pardon, Tuan," he smiled. "I age. My memory, like an old tree, commences to rot at the root." He stood at the rail, squat, capable, a weather-beaten and faithful servant of the Lady Kris, daughter of Robert Still, his beloved Master. Although the Lady Elinor had outlived his Master by many years yet his memory of her was hazy. After all, in spite of her powerful brain, she had been nothing more than a woman, and who troubled to remember women? Had he, he might have recognised Elinor's son in the bows.

The chanting of the junk crews, bound whither, made one with the Serang's gentle voice, the sun shone on his brown chest and many rings as he described The Island to the new guest. At least he presumed he was a guest, arrived a day before the general invitation, a day too soon, although the Lady Kris had said nothing about the ar-

rival. He certainly had luggage with him but orders were hard and fast about stray folk who arrived at the quay with the tale of being guests for The Island. Would one ever forget the trouble caused by the two young men who bribed the second serang, the loafing rascal, to take them over and then turned out to be nothing better than writers for some foreign newspaper. The Lady Kris's flashing eyes. Her tongue like a knife. But the something so familiar about this handsome foreigner had driven him to disobey orders, for the first time since he had entered the family's service all those years ago. He had not insisted upon the Silver Disc being produced.

The Lady Kris had a strange name for those uninvited and discourteous people who broke in upon her privacy by invading her shores. She called them 'Gate Crashers' and to circumvent them had been forced to supply her genuine guests with passes. Silver discs with the word 'Pass' in her own handwriting and a secret sign known only to herself and her servant. The secret sign made necessary through the invasion of The Island by a bunch of low caste tourists provided by that rascally guide, Tombaga, with faked discs. At the thought of what the Lady Kris might have in store for him the Serang touched a lucky charm at his neck and, as an excuse to linger near this intriguing stranger, pointed out what he thought might prove of interest.

HOPE ISLAND.

The winged boats, stationary or flying before the good south wind, were The Sampan Fishing Fleet, the Lady

Kris having suggested pushing out to sea as well as hugging the shore both day and night. Good fish? oh, excellent. On the east coast and well above tide level was The Fishing Village to which he, as one of the sea, belonged. A cheery, happy lot, the fisherfolk and, Allah be praised indeed, all true Malayans.

Each race had its own Village. Which helped to keep the peace. The fierce Tamil had theirs also the, what the Tuan Ol' Ik called 'Slimchinks,' though to his mind the Chinese were of a generous rotundity owing to the quantities of perfectly indescribable food they consumed at their Two Meals. For the Indians two villages. Mohammedan and Hindu. That certainly prevented not a little blood-spilling. And indeed his Excellency must ask the Lady Kris to show him a rare variety of Temples dotted all about. Two Mosques. A Buddhist temple. A Hindu temple built to the fierce Goddess Kali. A Confucian temple or Hall of Learning and a very simple English mosque where the holy Tuan Day officiated in a simple white-cotton gown.

"Mr. Grant, the young Mr. Grant, my school friend, has told me so much about Mr. Day." Strong got up and leaned on the rail beside the Serang. "Of how good he is and how he scours the ports for lost white folk, men and women I mean."

Ombak enthused. There was no one quite like the little holy man and had he not brought the Lady Kris into the world. And her brother——

"Oh, yes. The twin brother. What a pity he died. The Lady Kris would have found him a great help on The Island I should think."

Ombak drew himself up, very straight indeed. Help the Lady Kris! By no means. He outlined The Island with a slender hand. He would have his Excellency know that all upon it was the work of two women. The Lady Kris and her mother, the last dead these three years.

Those green terraces. Tier upon tier up to The Look Out on the top of the Point round which birds of all kinds circled and nested without fear of harm to them. Those terraces were rubber plantations. The best in the Malay. And well he remembered the day of the Lady Kris and her brother's birth, when the edge of the typhoon had swept the first plantations into the sea. That belt of trees facing due south, exactly opposite his Excellency? Those were fruit-groves of a most prolific bearing. All kinds of fruit, the ground, cleared, tilled, drained and enriched the reason of the fertility. Those red roofs? The smaller ones? They covered tool-houses which stored the necessary tools close to each plantation. Rice? no. The space lacked also 'paddi' fields produced a fertile crop of leech, barking bull-frog and mosquito. Rice was imported with other grain. Also meat for those who liked it. The Lady Kris ate no meat but she never forced her likes and dislikes down the throats of others as a very-much-to-be-avoided-Excellency known as the Tuan Gra' Din-Din had the pernicious habit of doing.

The harbour lay to the west of The Island, almost opposite Harimau Harbour on the mainland. North east were the poultry runs and cow sheds and the stables for the small ponies used for taking the less energetic of the guests up and down the steep steps from the harbour.

There was a hotchpotch of children all about and all more or less on milk and kept in order by the elders chosen by the Lady Kris. New overseers to each new moon and chosen by merit, by which he meant good conduct, clean house, person, clothes and a spotless morale. Certainly there were schools for the children. Each Temple had its school. There was also plenty of fun for them. Prizes, sports and visits to the pictures in Singapore and so on. Doctors? Ah, the Lady Kris and her mother had had the good sense to leave the question of medicine to the head of the different nationals, on the principle that what might cure a Tamil might kill a Slimchink or what would sooth a Malay would probably drive a southern Indian mad.

Might he tell his Excellency about what the Tuan Day called The Day of Judgment? It fell on the last day of each month. It was indeed a day. One of heart-uplift for the well-conducted and of knee-quake for those who had erred in things both great and small. Just after an early breakfast the Lady Kris would seat herself in a special chair under a special tree which spread canopy-wise above her gracious head. There she listened to complaints down to the smallest detail of any crime or quarrel. The plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses and wrongdoers dismissed, she then took council with the elders of each race. They would work it out together, the Lady Kris speaking to each most miraculously in his own tongue then passing sentence. And so just was she. Lenient? By no means. Was she not the daughter of the Tuan Robert Still who had been known for a great justice tempered with but little mercy? The Lady Kris young? Certainly she was. In years. But she

was wise, so very wise. People said that she should wed. It was not for him, a humble serang and her most faithful servant, to discuss their lady in any way but he sincerely hoped she would think the marriage question over a very long time.

As it stood, The Island was nothing less than an earthly paradise to those who worked upon it whereas a man might elect to see those little things to which the Lady Kris shut a diplomatic eye. Trifles which made work a pleasure, a joke, a joy instead of a grind in the heat.

He pointed. The big house faced the east and the ever turbulent China Sea. A beautiful place since the Lady Kris had worked upon it. Built back on a plateau and almost, but not quite, sheltered from the worst of the elements, those dreaded trouble-bringers the due north and the south-west winds, by the jutting sides to Bird's Point. That high peak on which a beacon flared in night of mist or driving storm and from where, through a telescope, all sorts of things could be discerned upon the mainland.

All that had to do with rubber, the work-shops, warehouses and plant lay to the north-west. And well hidden. A busy place where skilled men worked for their competent young Mistress and business men and planters came to discuss things with her. Did The Island work so hard, then? Oh, Excellency! Not only did The Island worship the Lady Kris but it also owned to a co-operative system devised by their Lady who, immensely wealthy through her masterful mother's methods, had suggested the staff coming into the business as shareholders.

"Oh, I see. The Lady Kris has turned The Island into a company. The Hope Company."

Not quite but almost, Ombak thought. The workers were allowed to buy shares out of their savings. Shares in everything except certain plantations. The Jacob, Leah and Rachael Plantations belonged to the Lady Kris only and that, Ombak thought, for some sentimental reason. Nor were The Island's savings to be scoffed at. No indeed. His brown eyes twinkled. Even if the women, and quite unknown to their Mistress, did indulge in a little Fish-Fighting now and then.

"And the men?"

They? oh, on their days off, and when they managed two together, they would just slip over to the mainland yonder for a little cock-fighting or a bull-fight should they be really in luck.

"The Tuan Ol' Ik——" Ombak nearly bit his tongue.

"Bull-fighting!" Strong pointed. "You mean bull-fighting over there. In Johore. But surely the British have something to say about a brutal sport like that."

Ombak glanced sideways. Come now, Excellency. What were a couple of mighty, savage water-buffalo the more, the less? Untractable beasts, they, and likely to turn and gore one at a moment's notice. He should have said gore the foreigner for whom, male, female and child, the drab devils had a particular loathing. Whereas a Malay mite of four, known as Udang Geragau, a shrimp of a thing who lived in The Village of The Bulls, could do anything she liked with the fiercest of the to-be-dreaded Fighting-Bulls and lead them anywhere just by hooking her finger into the beast's nose-ring. He touched a charm. Far be it from him to criticise anyone or any nation, be it white,

yellow or black, but to his mind it was far better to watch cattle fight to the death than two men in a ring for a money prize and surrounded by betting men and women of all nationality and caste. He laughed, the cheery old fellow.

Aha, The Village of The Bulls.

What they wanted over there was a tiger-hunt. Tiger! Aha! He talked in parable, of course. There was 'tiger' in the Peninsular further north, the small, fierce Malay tiger, but the particular one to which he alluded had only two legs. A devil with claws if ever there was one. A she-devil. A harlot known as Harimau which was Malay for tiger. A menace, that woman. To every hearth. A plague. Nothing but a plague. The holy Tuan Day had been trying this long time to get at her, perhaps for his Nut Basket, but had failed. Money was the only key to The Harlot's Gate and the little money the little Holy Man had he gave away in charity.

Personally he thought the extinction of the courtesan was a woman's job. One of the mothers, wives, or sweethearts whose son, husband or lover had been ruined by the shameless woman. Ruined and cast out. There had been just such a case lately in Singapore. A young Englishman. Well, well! Perhaps some day a woman who had lost her man to her or was threatened with the grievous loss, might find the courage to put an end to the evil woman, as one did to the rat in the grain.

Ah, they were approaching the cross-currents made by The Island dividing the waters. The harbour was a difficulty in most winds but when the tide was out or running

out from the mainland none but the heaviest craft could hope to make Singapore. The guests who had been caught by the tide and forced to stay the night with the Lady Kris were not to be counted. The Tuan Bill-ee and Moll-ee Gran' and the little Holy Man were expected that evening. His Excellency had a new motorboat and of a swiftness! He intended running out with the tide, waiting on The Island for it to turn and running on it back to Singapore.

He salaamed. Might he be excused. He must take the wheel. He bowed. "Excellency!" Strong looked at him. "Should the Lady Kris be angered over this too early arrival will your Excellency say one-two words in favour of Ombak. For not only is the Lady Kris of a great authority and sternness but to-day is for her a day of solitude." He touched a charm at his wrist. "She has passed this day alone, quite by herself."

"Is she ill?"

Ombak shook his head. No, not ill but it seemed that periodically the Lady Kris was overcome with a great loneliness. An obsession of loneliness. The mood did not stay. It passed, it did not endure for more than a day or two but during the spell she lived quite alone, saw no one, spoke to no one, not even to Ria, her favourite handmaiden.

"Your Excellency has no doubt heard that the Lady Kris is one half of a whole." He touched his faithful heart. "All the Malay, all Asia knows that the other half lies buried under the mango tree." He moved a little closer and whispered. "I will tell your Excellency that the twin

brother calls the Lady Kris. His spirit calls her from the grave and we, her servants who love her so, are afraid of the calling. It makes our Lady so sad, so lonely that sometimes we wonder what the end of it all will be."

He salaamed and went to take over the wheel, Strong leaned on the rail, his thoughts on the psychological obsession of the twin and Christine, through the telescope, wondered who the handsome, fair man was and why he came to The Island.

THE OLD LIVING-ROOM.

She kept him waiting.

Setia, the Faithful, head 'boy' and aging, so long had he been in the service of the Stills, a little at sea over this unexpected guest offered him a seat in the hall with refreshment, wine and cigarettes.

Strong refused them and sat there in the ruins of his plans.

Billy Grant had described the place as just an island with a bungalow on it and inhabited by a young woman called Still who would be sure to let it go for a good price down. Strong laughed. The Island was nothing but a domain and evidently perfect to the smallest detail. A dream place. Unique. What would the owner be like? This Christine Still of whom everyone had something to say and which said left the impression of the female type dominant, overbearing, hair aggressively short and manner as aggressively forceful.

He looked round the hall.

A luxurious place and totally unlike the picture drawn of it by Grant one chill evening on the Hill. A fountain threw its many coloured drops up to the pale-green ceiling-cloth. And had London, Paris or New York ever seen or sold such curtains? Of soft, green grass they were as pliable as velvet and woven at the edge with coarse white silk. You could see through them, too. Out onto the broad verandah with its rattan furniture, hammocks and palms growing from pots sunk into the flooring. The wind came in puffs across it, blew the grass curtains, made them undulate and unfolding one discovered the statue of a boy. Of a young falconer, straight as a pine, his right hand above his head, a falcon settling on the wrist. Strong crossed to the window and looked out. Through the palms at the end of the verandah he saw the figure of a boy turning cartwheels. And the lad on the rearing horse he had seen in the distance as he came up from the harbour? That would have been another statue group. He went back to The Falconer. By van Boeck, the famous Dutch sculptor. An original, of course, as the Dutchman refused even a photographic reproduction of his work. And would there be other groups about The Island? He nodded. He had the key to the Lady Kris, he thought. Of her reluctance to marry. Her loneliness. She was obsessed with the loss of her twin brother and lonely, because of it, as the skipper had told him, tried to fill the blank by placing statues of Boyhood about the place.

He cursed Billy. He, of course, had described The Island of the time of Robert and Elinor Still, the parents of the Lady Kris. Two rugged pioneers who had bought

the place in the rough and for a song and developed it with the help of Bramly Lowth, the man who had adopted him. The Lady Kris was indeed fortunate. She not only knew the date of her birth but she had known her parents. Having talked it over with the man who had adopted him he had fixed his own birthday on the fifteenth of September. Midway, as he had pointed out, between the beginning and the end of the month in which, from a ticket fastened to his clothes, it seemed, the Foundling Home had known he had been born.

He sincerely hoped the Lady Kris would be lenient when he explained how his fatuous intention of buying The Island had come about. How he wished, now, he had forbidden Grant mention his plans to anyone, even to his parents. How he wished she would come. Where could she be? this all powerful young woman so beloved of her servants.

He turned his back upon the sea and looked about the hall. Green and white matting, green furniture worked with a key-pattern in white fibre. Cool white flowers with their big green leaves. Green cushions and white and no sign at all of fussy, feminine frippery. A lack which doubtlessly made part of the owner's masculinity. He sat down, facing the sea. What would be behind the doors to his right and left? The hall in which he sat would be of course the old living-room of the time of Robert Still and Elinor his wife, a none too dulcet type of woman. Then the kitchen and scullery, or what had been those, would be behind the door to his right. And to the left? Of course. Grant said that Elinor Still's bedroom had led out of that

door. Then the twins, about whom he had heard so much, must have been born in that room. He got up, took a quick step forward and looked round sharply. He was connected with this room in a roundabout way. Bramly Lowth had sat here, a candle guttering on a table which must have stood where the fountain now played. His father, as he had called him, the man who had adopted him, had waited here, during the birth of the twins, Christine Still and her brother. Big, strong, powerful, Bramly Lowth had stood by to help. Had helped. With David Day, the little padre-doctor who had actually brought the twins into the world. Childless, Bramly Lowth had been in the house when a son had been born and lost to Elinor Still, and later, because he was childless, had been obliged to adopt a son to inherit his millions. A strange world. What a jumble Fate had made all round. And where was the Lady Kris? He wanted to explain things to her. He wished she would come.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

She came up from the east side of The Island. From the shore where Dera, The Swift, the runner, had found her discussing nets with the fishermen about to go a-fishing in the Sampan Fishing Fleet.

She looked at the card. So the young man who had come without with or by your leave was Christopher Strong. She read the name out loud and turned to look at the tip of the Peninsular which hid Singapore and showed as clear as cardboard in the setting sun. Bramly

Lowth's adopted son and about whom Billy had talked with such enthusiasm. Also Molly. Perhaps he was in love with athletic, gay, pretty Molly. This young millionaire who thought money could buy everything. Even her Island.

"Christopher Strong."

A powerful name. And her initials. Christine Still and Christopher Strong. She had a great mind to teach him a lesson. Show him that his wealth was less to her than her own pine-apples and cocoa-nuts. She would certainly teach Ombak, the serang, a lesson. Had he not been so old a servant she would have dismissed him then and there. What would have happened had not Billy and Molly arranged to try out their new motorboat on the outgoing tide? As far as The Island. Obliged to stay the night on Hope Island, because of the tide, this Christopher Strong would have given the Singapore gossips the chance of reminding her of the chaperone proposition she had so flatly turned down. And everyone knew that the gossips of the East were just one hundred per cent gossips. Bother the man!

"His Excellency waits, Mistress."

The Lady Kris's black eyebrows shot up on her low brow. His Excellency's comfort was to be looked after. He was to be offered refreshment. "And say that I am most unfortunately detained for the moment." She spoke sharply and watched the youth go. She looked at her dress, at the sky. It would be dark in an hour. She called the runner back. His Excellency was to be informed that as he was tide-bound he would honour her by passing the night

upon The Island. She thought a moment. Setia was to prepare the corner west rooms. At once. His Excellency would be informed that his bath waited and if he had brought his evening clothes they were to be got ready. If he had not then the garments he wore were to be pressed. The contents of the Guest Cupboard were to be offered. The silk shirts, socks and night attire. "Now go!" She watched him run and called him back. "Tell Setia that when their Excellencies Grant arrive we dine on the verandah after they have bathed. He is to see that both cooks do their very best." She looked at the setting sun. "Marus and Sedap are to pick fruit at once. There is just time. Light the lanterns all over The Island and my orders are that every servant puts on his best and her prettiest clothes. The outdoor dancing-floor is to be polished. At once. And the fairy lights lit in the almond trees near it. Now run!"

Dera ran for all he knew, the tone of the Lady's voice a lash to his heels. The news flashed across The Island. There was the sound of swift feet, the clash of bracelet and anklet. Whispering. A great deal to do and very little time to do it in but not only that. The Lady Kris seemed to be of an uncertain temper.

Lights flashed here and there as Christine mounted and the small pony commenced its clattering ascent. Strong heard the sound and went out onto the verandah. Night had fallen like a soft purple mantle patterned with diamonds. Lights twinkled. Flashed. Shone in strings and clusters. Bow drawn, arrow trained on his heart, a young boy laughed at him round the corner of the verandah.

Strong stepped back. The laughing boy stood quite still. Strong laughed. Yet another statue of Boyhood. Another sign of the psychological obsession of the twin. He caught the sound of voices, the sight of a white figure on a black pony then turned as Setia salaamed.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

They saw each other on the stairs.

The verandah ran the length of the bungalow and the wings. From the angle where the wings joined the main building stairs led down from the roof-garden, in short flights ending in small landings lit by lights concealed in growing flowers. The last flight, turning sharply, came down at the back of the verandah. The flights were wide and shallow, the stairs uncarpeted so that high heels tapped a tattoo.

Strong came down from the right wing. Christine from the left, from the roof-garden, in the soft lights concealed on the landings. They heard each other on the stairs and stopped to look at each other, across the verandah, they thought, but really across the twenty years which had divided them.

"Christopher Strong!" His sister stood, her hand on the rail, looking at him.

"Christine Still!" her brother stood, his hand on the rail, looking at the picture she made.

She looked like a dark flower shot up from the sheath of her green and white dress which showed her slender ankles and swept her heels in a wide fan of flounces. Long

lace sleeves to her fingers showed her arms. Lace covered her breast. There was a big pearl on her breast and big pearls in her ears, white jewels against her hair. From where he stood her hair looked like a black-silk cap drawn back from her low forehead but when she turned to come down the last flight he saw it was coiled in a big, black knob in the nape of her neck.

They came down the stairs looking at each other. Her high heels tapped a warning. Her dress whispered of peril ahead of them. His first word, even before their hands touched, begged a boon and her long black lashes hid her smiling eyes.

"Can you forgive me?"

"The Malay says that knowledge is forgiveness because knowledge is understanding."

"Let me tell you how the mistake came about."

"Over dinner? or whilst I show you The Island so that you can grasp the vastness of your mistake?" She smiled, her beautiful teeth exactly like her twin brother's. "Appetite is the kitchen clock here. When I am hungry I strike this gong once. That warns my Malay cook and gives him half an hour to get ready in." She struck the gong lightly three times, took the menu from Setia and handed it to her guest. "If there is anything you would prefer? I am a vegetarian but my French chef is somewhat of a genius."

"So am I. A vegetarian I mean."

She opened her smiling eyes so wide he saw they were a very dark blue instead of the almost black he had thought them to be. They laughed. A dimple showed in her cheek when she turned and flicked a wine glass.

"Yes, prohibitionist, too. And I don't smoke." He looked down at her, at the top of her smooth head which came to his shoulder. "I have no idea whom my parents were but I think one of them or perhaps both were abstemious and had a tremendous pre-natal influence on me."

"Oh, of course, but of course, you are Bramly Lowth's adopted son. I quite forgot. Do please forgive me." Christine put her hand in his. "Be very welcome to the house he so often visited. The home of my parents who too were such stern prohibitionists." She gave orders for the cooks, for Billy and Molly when they arrived then went to the door. "Come and let me show you the vastness of your big mistake, Mr. Strong." She gathered up her trailing dress and went out with him under the stars.

A rocket soared from the north, broke and streaked the sky with showers of gold, blotting out the stars. "My Chinese servants celebrate the birth of a son to a man who so far has been disgraced by the birth of three daughters. Listen. Do you hear? We rejoice in a variety of sound. The Chinese guitar *and* voice. Conchshells, gongs, pipes, bells and drums. I am so accustomed to them that I only seem to hear them when they stop." She looked towards the north whilst he looked down at her. "The drum, I think, expresses the emotions better than any other instrument. Love, hate, triumph, joy and sorrow——"

"Sacrifice——"

"Sacrifice? isn't that a principle? Isn't it the root of our parents' and our own prohibitive leanings?"

"I don't think I agree. I believe our refusal to either

smoke or drink comes from knowing that both are false appetites rather than from a feeling that by refusing them we are doing without something we might like. Greed of all sorts is a false appetite, isn't it?"

"It is, in anything from cake to islands." She smiled. "Though I don't think I can accuse you of greed even if you did want to snatch my Island from under my feet. You wanted it so as to benefit mankind. That puts you on a quite high plane, I think." She looked up as a rocket soared, broke to the four points and stabbed the night with fiery darts. "I refuse to give you The Island but not out of greed." She looked at him. "I think when you have seen the workshops and villages, the schools and clinics, especially the childrens' clinic, that you will agree I am as great a benefactor to mankind as one day you will be." She walked towards a clump of mango, her dress trailing. A frill catching on a cactus spike Strong bent to loosen it as she bent down. He pulled her hands away from the needle-point, loosened the frill and straightened himself, his cheek touching hers as a rocket soared, broke and strewed the sky with garlands, fans and fantasies.

"How deathly white that light made you look."

"And you."

"It's strange how perfectly at home I feel with you. I come as a declared enemy——"

"To stay as a friend, I hope." Christine spoke evenly and turned away. "Shall we climb to The Point? I could explain the whole Island from there and we might see Billy, your friend, and Molly, his pretty sister, morsing us as they come. My shoes?" She laughed. "One of my

few extravagances, what you would call a greed, is shoes. I love them, I love my pretty feet when I take my stockings off." She lifted her skirt, her shoes long green points on the crazy pavement which led to the edge of the plateau. She tried to converse politely. She was bewildered. By the ease with which this man had slipped under the guard of her great reserve. A none too friendly barrier softened for her surface friends with a most entrancing hospitality. What was there about him? why did he seem to stand out from every other man she had ever met? He was undoubtedly good-looking but in the East handsome men were far more numerous than at home she had been told. Not that she had any inclination towards men good-looking, passable or plain.

She turned down a side path and stopped when Strong exclaimed.

He stood staring at the young man in a loin cloth who came running through the trees, or, rather, had the appearance of running as lithe, sinewy, he stood poised on one foot.

"How exactly like me!"

Christine's hand went to her heart. A shiver swept her. She knew why Christopher Strong stood out from every other man. He was what she had always imagined her twin brother would have been like had he lived. "It is one of van Boeck's finest," she said and crossed the grass to the clump of mango bent this way and that by twenty years 'weather.' "My twin brother is buried here." She pointed to the little mound. "There is only the date of his birth, our birthday, on the stone. You see he died unbaptised, on

the fifteenth of September, twenty years ago." She looked at him. "What made you start?"

Strong explained about his birthday. "What a coincidence, isn't it?"

"Coincidence?" Christine bent to brush dead leaves from the mock grave, the knob of her black hair twisting sideways and leaving her white neck bare. "I don't think there is such a thing as coincidence. I am a fatalist. One can't live amongst the Oriental as I do without imbibing a little of their beliefs or outlook on life." She straightened herself, her face so grave. "But though I am surrounded by all kinds of religions mine is very simple, of the simplest. I will show you my church to-morrow. Mother had it built. It is a copy of a little country church near the hamlet where she was born in Yorkshire. We have some beautiful windows but the pews are very hard. Uncle David, David Day, the missionary, a saint on earth, gave the single bell." She smiled and shook her head. "Can a woman keep to the point? I was talking about my brother. He was my twin as I expect you know. He died shortly after his birth and was buried here." She put her hand on Strong's arm. "How connected you really seem with all this. Bramly Lowth, your father by adoption as Molly calls him, had the little thing buried here." She looked down when Strong covered her hand with his. "I have always grieved over my twin brother. I have always longed for him. Uncle David explains my longing after all these years, and in spite of my brother being dead, as just part of the twin obsession. I expect you know what I mean as Billy Grant was a friend of yours, is, I should say."

"Yes, it would be difficult I should think to find twins more wrapped up in each other, more, as you say, obsessed with each other than Grant and his sister seem to be." Strong looked at her. "Are you like your mother?"

"I? like Mother? no, I'm like my Father. Mother was truly Saxon. So fair." Christine looked at him. "Fairer than you, with grey eyes and a very stern mouth and manner. She was not a soft woman. Uncle David says she grew hard after the death of my brother, you see she had longed for a boy so. I think you might grow like her if you had to work for a living as she had to, at the beginning." She shook her head. "No, Mother was not soft. She refused to have a tombstone to this grave because my brother died unbaptised." She turned and looked at the statue, the lithe figure poised on one foot. "When Mother died and I became Mistress here I tried to right the wrong done my brother as much as I could. I brought his cradle down from the attic, gave him this little tombstone and, I expect you know I am very wealthy, bought van Boeck's famous Boyhood studies."

"This makes the fourth I've seen."

Christine explained. The cradle made the first record of her brother. Then the grave. After that, for each five years, she had bought the most beautiful statue she could find and had placed them about The Island. The one at five years, a Boy Fishing in a Pool, she would show him the next day, or the day following. The fishermen reported bad weather and from the north which meant that he and the Grants might have to prolong their stay. The second statue at the age of ten was The Boy and The

Arrow. She loved that one. She would sometimes stand in front of it, the arrow trained on her heart. She was so dreadfully lonely sometimes, too, that she wished the arrow might pierce her heart. She sighed. Then came The Falconer, generally hidden in the curtain. He had seen that? Was it not beautiful? and just what her brother would have been like at that age. After that, The Tamer, a boy riding a restive horse, which he could see from his bedroom window. That and the youth running, The Victor, were both at the age of twenty——"

"I'm twenty."

Christine shivered suddenly. "I think we had better be moving," she said and turned for her shawl. "The sea keeps the terrible Malay damp from us but it is wise to wrap up after sunset." She walked on, the long fringe of her shawl swinging. "Twenty. That makes three what you call coincidences. First you choose the fifteenth of September for your birthday, secondly you are twenty, my age——"

"And the third?"

She looked at him. Should she tell him? She had told no one. Not even her Uncle David. The secret was such an intimate part of herself. She turned and walked back to the grave where she flashed the light of her torch over the stone at the head. "Because of your name I will tell you something, Mr. Strong, which I have told no one else." She knelt down at one side of the grave, Strong knelt at the other. "Can you read the name scratched at the foot of the stone?"

Strong rubbed the stone with his finger and deciphered

the word. "Christopher!" he said and looked up. "You don't mean it."

Christine nodded and got up. "I have always called my brother Christopher, first because the name is so like mine and then because of the Cristophe, the French tapping knife. It linked me to him because of the initials." She looked up at him. "You and I have the same initials, you know."

"Yes, and two powerful names." He talked as they walked towards The Point. "Two strong individualities, too. I don't know you really but I can tell you what you are though I couldn't tell you how I know. You are as strong as steel, Christine Still, and for your principles, religious or ethical, you would not hesitate at the greatest sacrifice——"

"No more would you."

"No, no more would I. If your religion is simple, mine is the same. I believe in kneeling to God upon bare boards, in the cold as well as in the warmth, in times of gladness as well as in tribulation." She slipped her arm through his as they walked under the trees. "If one trusts one can't go wrong. The world thinks the millionaire has no worries because he can buy everything the world has to offer. The world forgets the great temptations. Is there any soul so tempted of the devil as the rich man? The poor man is tempted but as sheer poverty, more often than not, is the reason of his fall, I should think the Recording Angel makes a point of wiping the poor man's slate clean. But not the wealthy man's. He falls through greed, through the senses every time. There is something

he wants but should not have. He will have it. It is his and he holds it. Right, or purity, says let go. The devil says hold on. He holds on to something he ought to renounce and that God will *not* forgive." He shook his head. "Nor will you forgive me."

"You should have taken Orders. No? why not?"

"I will tell you, if you will let me, someday. When I know you better, though I seem to know you so well now."

"Shall we climb together?"

"Symbolically?"

"Yes." Christine began to climb the steep path, lights twinkling in the plantations, stars through the trees. "And actually, too." She looked back, laughing. "I am proud of myself as a climber. I do this three times a day sometimes and always in dirty weather." She climbed quickly as she talked. "I will tell you about the rubber plantations another time. There is very little I don't know about rubber. I was brought up on it as other children are on bread-and-milk and fairy tales." She pointed up through the treetops. "You see? That is the very top, really high ground."

THE BEACON.

"Is that a watch-tower?"

"We call it The Look-Out and The Beacon is on its other side." She explained as they climbed.

In her mother's time The Beacon had been a simple matter of the night-watchman adding an oil-soaked log to the burning pile when necessary. The man had risked both life and limb up there in the tearing winds. Through

the wind lifting The Beacon and blowing it out to sea there had been one terrible shipwreck. Christine, big of heart and so solicitous for her servants, had changed all that, with the help of David Day and a young engineer called Gough, of whose tragic end he had undoubtedly heard.

Arrived at the top she pointed out The Beacon. A big iron basket clamped to the sides of a deep cleft in the rock. The fissure had been blasted out and a small oil tank, fed from a side pipe, sunk in the floor and under the basket. The logs, oil-soaked, all the same size and of light timber, were piled in the basket the first fine day following bad weather. In storm a switch, at the base of The Point, lit the oil which immediately fired the logs. Once The Beacon properly lit and the flames soaring well above the peak, old Pelita took a hand. She, pelita being Malay for lamp, had constituted herself lighthouse keeper. On the strength of her name. At the base of The Point, it being strictly forbidden to climb the peak in rough weather, she manipulated another switch. That started and also stopped the buckets, or small baskets, which, on the mud-dredge principle, fed The Beacon all night. At certain intervals, so as not to choke the furnace, the small baskets climbed the gauge to the edge of the Basket, tilted, emptied the log into the furnace and returned on the down gauge to re-fill, repeating the process all through the night.

Who put the logs into the small baskets? No one. They were stacked in an especially made rack which spanned the gauge near the base. As the empty bucket approached

the rack it pressed a switch which released a trap-door in the rack's underside. The log slid through the door into the small basket, was carried up the track and dropped into the furnace. It had never failed. The sides of The Point, in which the fissure had been made, protected the furnace from the rain and from every wind that blew.

"The shipwreck was too terrible." Christine pointed out east. "The night the wind blew the old-fashioned Beacon out to sea it was impossible to build another and a great Chinese junk, with a crew of two hundred, drove straight onto the shore and foundered with all hands." She shook her head. "I can still hear the dreadful, dreadful screaming of the drowning men. This iron ladder?" She ran a finger over iron steps which led up to the top of the Basket and down its inner side to the furnace bed.

Once in a way Pelita indulged in what the rest of The Island called Volcano Day. A dusty period in which, supported by a small army of young volunteers from each village, she cleansed The Beacon of the accumulated ash and after a system of her own which decorated The Point with a plume of ash, yards high, for hours.

"The Basket looks just like a bedstead which has been blown into the cleft."

"Yes, and after a storm the ash looks exactly like a lovely, soft, whitey-grey eiderdown." She took his hand over the narrow path to The Look Out. "If the bad weather does come from the north we shall light The Beacon and then you must climb, with my permission, and watch it working."

There was nothing for the wind to lift in The Look

Out. Squat, it was stoutly built of stone and clamped with iron. Nothing there to break. An iron table, iron seats sunk into the ground. The wind ruffled Christine's hair. When she clapped her hands birds, grey-black in the night, flew screaming out to sea. She laughed. The silly things were scared of her but had grown quite accustomed to the blazing beacon. "And look!" She pointed south-west to where a spot of light flashed off and on. "There they are. This switch is a special light for morsing. I'll tell them I have a great surprise waiting for them." She flashed the light and translated the answer. "How nice. Uncle David, David Day, you know, and Uncle Olly, I mean Hickory Hicks, are with them. Also Sunyi, the Grants' head 'boy.'" She listened, laughing, to the account of the lunch in which the old wastrel had given Strong the bearings of The Island. "He's a villain and we all adore him. He's at his best with Grannie Dindings. She keeps the brake of her caustic tongue on him." She gathered up her skirts. "In fact I always think it was just that brake which brought their love affair of almost fifty years ago to a dead stop. We will go down and we must be quick. It will spoil the surprise for Billy if they meet you in the garden." She ran down a step and stopped, rocking on her high heels.

Strong picked her up in his arms without a word nor, had you asked him, could he have explained the sensation that swept him. Of the senses not a stirring. His heart beat no quicker. He had no desire to tighten his hold however slightly on the slim body in his arms. He wanted to protect her. Her lovely feet from the steep way down. Her dress from things growing. From all harm.

Her cheek against his shoulder she wondered how all this had come about? She was being protected, looked after. For the first time in her independent life. She said nothing when he put her on her feet near the verandah. Waited for him to straighten out her frills and walked up the steps, her high heels tapping.

So this mystifying girl was Christine Still.

Why did she mystify? why did he feel as though he had known her for a very long time? Was it something stretching out from a past life? Was there a psychic bond between them? A life bond. Like the bond between the two young Grants? Would re-incarnation explain the mystery and the lack of anything to do with the senses in his intense admiration of her? There was no time to thresh the intriguing question out now but it would make a deep and interesting subject for conversation later, when he had got to know her better.

Molly's gay laughter rang through the night. They heard Day protesting, the clatter of hoofs, Hick's great voice booming.

Billy stopped dead on the threshold.

"Strong! well I'm damned!"

"Oh, Squirrel, darling!" From behind Molly put her hands over Day's ears. "Why will you worry about native nuts when you've a blasphemous, home-grown heathen like Billy waiting to be cracked?"

FATE'S INSTRUMENT.

They discussed the question of a picnic on the mainland over dinner.

"Oh, do let's!"

"But there'd be nothing in a picnic with only two women and one a sprat like yourself, to divide between four men, Molly."

"If our beloved and orthodox Squirrel weren't here, Chris, I'd quote from the Scriptures to show you what can be done with a scarcity of fish." Molly unhooked herself from Billy and slid an arm in Day's. "My lamb, you're the only soul in the Malay who has the slightest influence over the Lady Kris. Indeed, with a little more *je ne sais quoi* on your part you'll have her eating out of your benevolent hand. You know you've only got to push a ha'penny worth, I should have said cent's worth, of influence into the slot of her good humour and out pops the picnic. How about it, Old Hiccoughs? oh, I beg your pardon upon my bended knees. I mean won't it, Uncle Olly, darling?" She winked at the old fellow, who, exceeding mellow with good and liquid cheer, winked back at her. "A teeny-weeny al fresco at your palatial residence nigh unto ye Village of ye Bulls. Why, we might even get a glimpse at them as hors d'œuvres and a sight of the scarlet woman, you know, Harimau, The Tigress, as a cayenne savoury. That uncrackable nut the darling Squirrel's been aching to get into his mishy claws, paws I mean, for many a moon."

Removing her arm Day begged her to remember her manners. "They're as slangy and as loosely strung together as your speech, my dear." He settled his collar with finality. "And for pity's sake kill two birds with one stone by minding your own business whilst leaving mine alone."

"There! my darling Squirrel's dived off the bough's deep end right into the fault-finder's stinging nettles." Molly walked round the table and sat on the arm of Christine's chair. "Lady Kris, do! Think what a first impression yon stranger in our midst would get out of a sight of our Malay tiger." She laughed at Strong sitting at Christine's left. "The Harimau's just beauty and immorality wrapped loosely in a sarong, which vestment is a bit of cloth or silk we bind about us as a negligé and behind locked doors when the barometer's going to burst." She laughed. "Uncle Olly's got a Primus so we can make our own coffee whilst employing the bulls as pack-horses to carry our food and gear from the village on their revolting backs or round their loathsome necks." The chosen instrument of Fate, she slipped from her perch, young, pretty and so gay, took a handful of yellow flowers out of a vase and worked them into the old wastrel's hair. "How do I know Uncle Olly's got a Primus. I'll whisper and you shall hear." She lowered her voice. "Mother doesn't know and never will because she's getting stout, superfluous tissue hampers the heart and that tends to syncope, but Uncle Olly and I have already had a snippet of an al fresco for two in his jungle ridden habitat—Uncle Olly, my pet, you look for all the world like Marcus Aurelius junketing in the Forum—Billy was at the picnic of course because we twain are but one with nothing but a single thought to go fifty-fifty on but he spent his time ferreting round the ring, the bull-ring, on the off chance of meeting something blue-eyed, mud-coloured and decorated with horn." She stretched and

touched her good-looking brother. "Billy's coughing, Chris, and I think a sea-trip to the Johore coast would cure it." She slid into Hick's chair when he got up to investigate something caught in a spider-plant. "I hate to hear him cough. We came out with a darling boy——"

"You mean the young Duke of Elmswood who's supposed to be consumptive."

Molly leaned her elbows on the table the better to describe the young peer who had been on his way to Peking to see what the dry winter months there would do for a faulty lung. She switched back to Billy as Hicks came up behind her with a finger-napkin. She thought——

Hicks put the finger-napkin over her mouth from behind and nodded, laughing at Christine.

"Sunyi!"

"Mistress?"

"Send Daria to bring Ombak here at once." Christine turned to Strong who sat watching her, so sure of herself, so really beautiful against the high back of her chair. "You have no idea, Mr. Strong, what we have to put up with from the weather. If trouble should be coming down from the north then we shall have to think twice before crossing to the mainland without our night things——"

"Plus day and night wear enough for a week's unexpected sojourn in the Johore wilderness inhabited by two-legged carnivora." Molly laughed. "Fancy a week in The Village of The Bulls. It'd be like dangling between Scylla and Charybdis. How, my Uncle Olly?" She arranged a flower over the old man's ear. "We two women sitting by the Primus knitting whilst you men, divided against your

better selves, ran here for a glimpse of the bovines otherwise Scylla and there for one of the crimson Charybdis, otherwise Harimau, the——"

"Come here, Molly, and be quiet."

Molly crushed herself into the chair beside the brother she loved so as Ombak came up the steps.

Squat and in best raiment he salaamed. "Johore, Lady Kris, to-morrow?" He stepped back and looked to the north. There was certainly trouble of some sort coming. That light mist on the calm waters was nothing but the storm holding its breath. And Johore? Across that tricky stretch of water? ah, and an out-of-door repast there? How far would the Lady Kris be going inland? To the Village of the Bulls? To the Tuan Ol' Ik's residence. He arranged his handsome cap. The honour of safeguarding the Lady Kris on the water was entirely his and when the water between The Island and the mainland fled before the buffeting of the wind from the north no craft but a heavy junk would dare the crossing back, the return to The Island, and then starting from a spot miles up the coast to the north on account of the fierce current. Not that he would attempt the crossing with the most precious Lady Kris and her honoured guests aboard. No, what he feared would be a night, perhaps two nights, on the mainland for the honoured party. His Excellency's residence, he looked at Hicks and salaamed, lay almost directly in the path trodden by the drab devils, the Fighting-Bulls, when they went down to the stream in which they lay for the best part of the day with nothing but their evil-begotten faces showing. Those beasts had no manners.

None at all. Leave the gate open and in they walked. Ate everything there was to eat and a good deal that was not meant for consumption and, because it stood in their way, pushed the garden wall or the house wall down by battering it with their heads. Then walked on. Yes, that was what he really feared.

Whilst the others consulted he picked up a message morsed him by Molly's eyebrows and looked at the handsome stranger sitting near the beloved Lady Kris. He frowned. There again. That something he seemed to remember in the new guest. A turn of the head. A mannerism. He must ask Old Khalasi who had been old when he had entered the late Master's service. The only one, beside himself, left of the old servants. He smiled when Christine spoke. Would she allow him to report the weather prospects in the early morning? Then he would be quite sure about the crossing. He salaamed and went to find Old Khalasi in The Fishing Village.

THE CRONIES.

"He either lies, friend," said Ombak to his crony, "or I have seen his handsome face in street or foreign newspaper."

"Or maybe in that invention of Shaitan, the devil-begotten pictures that come to life and move and talk, in Singapura."

Ombak thought that very likely and, unaware of the vanity which prevented Old Khalasi from wearing specs to rectify a failing eyesight, suggested tip-toeing over to

have a peep at Strong on the verandah. "If you see what I think I see, friend, then shall we know that his Excellency lies and that this is not his first visit to the Malay." They walked across The Island studded with lights and came to a standstill at the sound of Molly's laughter.

JEALOUSY.

"It's a perfectly topping floor, Mr. Strong, and I'm thrilled to death over your love of dancing even if you don't smoke or imbibe," she was saying. "I hope you won't mind if I call you Christopher at breakfast and Chris at sunset. My coat of arms is a ballet shoe and the slogan underneath it 'Friend of all and enemy of none.' "

"When will you grow up, Molly?"

"Grow up, Uncle Olly?" A silvery sylph Molly slid over the floor to the wireless. "I shall grow up when something grown up happens along to make me grow up. When some dramatic situation makes me shoot from a budding bud into one of life's full-blown blooms." She laughed, so gay, so ignorant of the storm ahead which would help her to grow up in one night. "Listen, that's the Europe. No, it isn't. It's the Raffles, I recognise the gurgling saxaphone."

"Will you dance this with me, Lady Kris?"

Christine shook her head. She was really not keen on dancing.

"Oh, Chris, how can you! She's the most perfect dancer in the Malay, Mr. Strong, and's simply being exclusive to shore her status as Still of Hope Island." Molly put

her hand on Strong's arm. "Uncle Olly, my lambkin, let the Squirrel show you The Nutty Nautch as taught exclusively in The Day School whilst Billy entertains the Lady Kris and I try out on the stranger in our festive midst."

Only Day caught the flash in Christine's face, the light, instantly hidden, in her eyes. His russet eyebrows wrinkled. A flash of what? Annoyance? And did her swift words spring from annoyance, too?

"I've changed my mind, Molly." Christine got up. She was rent with jealousy. Molly in Christopher Strong's arms! She half closed her eyes to hide the angry light in them. Her dealings with the Oriental had taught her to show no emotion on her face. Her love for her twin brother was born in torment. She got a hold of herself, with an effort, and laughed. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Strong," she said, her eyes like steel. "Molly's the super-perfect dancer of the Malay. You——"

Strong smiled as he drew his twin sister into his arms. "Don't make me dance with her, Lady Kris. Not after this. Not to-night. I couldn't. And will you make some excuse to leave off dancing when this is finished?" he whispered.

"How white are their faces," whispered Ombak to his crony in the shadows of the trees. "White as death. Both of them. What a handsome pair, old friend. Think'st thou 'tis love which draws the blood from their hearts? which turns their faces white? Do we look upon the future master to The Island? and see'st thou the likeness I think I see?"

Old Khalasi rubbed his eyes. That might well be and should be. A son to the Lady Kris would be the crowning glory to The Island. But as to the likeness to any of the thousand foreigners he had met, no, he did not see it. How could he, being partly blind? "He is fair and tall, like so many of his race." He smiled. "But 'tis said he is of a very goodly wealth."

Molly caught the rustle of their sarong against the bush. "What's that, Billy?" She looked up at him when he made no answer. "Billy?" She leaned back in his arms. "What's the matter, Bill?"

Billy looked down at her, eyes flashing. "I'm going back to-night. Now. You can stay if you like. I don't mind in the least."

"Going back! Whatever for?"

"If you think I'm standing for your flirting with Strong you're jolly well mistaken." He whispered he was so angry. "How can you! You're just like a rowdy—a—a——" He looked down at her, saw a tear. "Darling, I can't bear it. I can't bear you to look at another fellow." He stopped her in the shadows. "I'm afraid of Strong. I believe he's fallen for you. I'd kill him or anyone who took you from me. I would. I'd murder anyone who came between us. You don't love me as I love you. I know you don't. You couldn't."

Molly rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. "Love you, Billy? Perhaps someday we shall fall in love with someone else as other twins do though I can't imagine us doing it. But not now." Her voice was harsh, almost ugly as she clung to him. "I can't help making a noise,

Bill. I can't help laughing or being young. That's because I am young. But if I saw you heading for any man-eating, vicious, made-up woman, married or not, I'd *kill* to save you from her." To get a hold of herself she hid her face against his shoulder. "I love you, Bill, indeed I love you dearly." She whispered then laughed. "And you'll have to take to glasses. I'll tell you something, a secret. Something you've missed." She stood on tip-toe and whispered in his ear. "Christopher Strong's fallen for Christine Still all of a sudden Malayan night." She kissed him. He kissed her. She called to the others. "Ho, there! we're off to bathe. Any others? Uncle Olly, my pet, water's absolutely scrumptious to *swim* in. Squirrel, my flying-fish, come and show me that speedy side-stroke cum crawl. We may have to negotiate the Hebrides, or is it Hellespont, to-morrow, chased by blue-eyed water-buffalo." She waited and thus escorted went down to the cove leaving the others talking.

OF THIS AND THAT.

Arid with curiosity Ria peeped through the door crack. At this guest who seemed not only to have made a stir about the whole island but to have wakened interest in the Lady Kris. Christine was wise to the peeping through the crack. Not only did the door move slightly but interest in one's neighbour's love affairs, and indulgence in them per se, made a big part of the Malayan lighthearted complex.

"We are being spied upon," she said as she embroidered something in silk for the son born to the Chinese so far

disgraced by daughters. "So as to be able to report on you to the rest of The Island, my maid, Ria, the daughter of my Mother's nurse, is taking stock of you."

"You mean daughter of the Malay woman who was killed by the ceiling falling on her?" Strong looked across Christine. "She must have been killed inside that door on the right. I have it firmly fixed in my head that my father, my father by adoption I mean, sat just where we're sitting now, with a guttering candle on a table which stood where the fountain is, I should think."

Christine nodded. "I see I shall have to open my Inner Door to you. Because of Bramly Lowth." She folded her work. "Yes, the kitchen and scullery used to be behind that door and," she glanced across the room, "behind that other door, where my maid is spying, and which I call my Inner Door, I and my brother were born. I have made it my own sitting-room. Leading out of it is my bedroom and everything that had to do with my brother is in there. His cradle, which is, of course, my most cherished possession. A work basket. A long-chair. Everything. He was born about ten minutes before me, you know."

She crossed her beautiful feet and changed the subject.

"I shall bore you with my obsession. No one but a twin could possibly understand a twin." She smiled. "Now tell me, if you will, why, with your strong religious views, you didn't go into the Church?" She looked at him. "You would have made a great reformer, I think. Hard, almost narrow and not too easily forgiving." She clasped her hands in her lap. "To my mind there has always been a streak of—of harshness, almost brutality, in all the great

clergy and certainly in every reformer. There is the Inquisition for the clergy. Cromwell and Luther, men of might those two reformers, were brutes in their way."

Then Strong surprised her.

It was just that streak which had prevented him from entering the Church. He was too hard. Too intolerant. He was young, barely twenty, but his religious views were set as hard as concrete. What was wrong, to him was wrong and nothing and no one could make him see it right. He saw no middle path. Religion to him or, rather, good and bad, were black and white. There could be no grey. "Outside the Church, Lady Kris, I am nothing much more than a philanthropic millionaire. Inside the Church I should have been unorthodox to heresy." He sat forward, elbows on knees. "But not only that. To my mind every priest, no matter of what creed or denomination, should be celibate because it is impossible to keep the mind clear if you mix the carnal and the spiritual." He looked up at her. "I have the power to love in me. The longing. I may never meet the woman I want to cherish and protect. I may meet her and crush the love. Why crush? Because this love I am speaking of does not seem natural to me, does not seem normal." He frowned, trying to explain the dormant bond of twinship which obsessed him. "I'm not speaking of everyday physical love between man and woman. It is something finer, by which I mean more—more rare—nearer, far nearer and dearer——"

"It sounds to me more like the bond between Billy and Molly and which would have been between me and my brother who was born in that room."

He took her hand when she stretched it out to him. Held it between both of his. "I make no excuse for speaking like this to you when I have only known you for a few hours, Lady Kris. You are the root of the conversation. You started it when you told me of your longing for your brother."

"For Christopher."

"For Christopher. You have made me speak like this. I have never before. Never. But you see, don't you, how impossible it is for me to think of the Church. I am sure you understand because I am positive there is the same streak of fanatic strength in you as there is in me. Perhaps intensified in you because when a woman has an outstanding personality it is usually far stronger than any man's." He looked at her hand in his. "Though of course the streak is quite easy to understand in you because of your missionary forebears." He smiled at her. "In honour to his God no man could enter the Church obsessed as I am with the longing, with the craving to meet my—my——"

"Affinity? no, that is a stupid word."

"I could almost say my other half."

"Oh, but that is only allowed the twin."

"I know. I know it's not the right expression because I'm not a twin but it's the nearest I can get to it."

"Let us talk of it again. When we are more alone and less pressed for time." Christine clapped her hands. "If we picnic to-morrow, if Ombak allows us, that is, we shall have to start quite early because of the tide. Oh, Ria,

is that you? I am going to bed. This is Ria, Mr. Strong, the daughter of Malaya."

"*Tabek,* Tuan." Ria salaamed, bracelets clashing. "You bath, Excellency, yes? sea it full of small wave? You bath sea, Lady Kris? No. You bath house, yes, it is ready then."

"My house is entirely yours, Mr. Strong. Ask for anything you want and do exactly as you like. If you would prefer a different view just change your rooms." Christine held out her hand. "I am glad you took me unawares. I think I am glad you did not enter the Church." She went to the north door. "Here come the others. I can hear Molly. She will want just one more dance."

Strong ran for the upper storey.

On the landing he looked down at his twin sister.

From the doorway of the room in which they had been born she stood looking up at him.

FURTHER ALONG.

THE PICNIC.

THE Serang kept one eye on the little waves which danced between the mainland and The Island and the other on the great clouds driving down from the north. Ugly, blackish masses lined with dirty white and broken at the edges. Wrapped in mist the top of The Island seemed to float in the sky. In the far distance. So distant none but a sailor's vision could have distinguished it from the driving clouds.

Now that the picnic party had prepared itself for calamitous emergency by bringing with it everything necessary for the night—and what a lot the white races seemed to require for sleeping—Ombak sincerely hoped the waves would attain mountain height between here and there. Even were bull-fighting not towards cock-fighting would be, if only between low-caste birds in a low-caste backyard. Also the presence in the Village of Harimau, the courtesan, promised a pleasant running to and fro plus gossip spicy.

The Tong—Tub—as the Tuan Moll-ee had irreverently christened the apple of his eye, lay comfortably alongside the battered hulk owned by the Tuan Ol' Ik. The honoured party, with Ria in waiting upon the ladies and

Sunyi, reinforced by two, upon the gentlemen, made merry in the derelict Bungalow which lay behind the Bull-Ring. How gracious the Lady Kris looked this day in her white raiment with the small, round, red cap fitting her pretty head so closely. How gentle her voice. How soft her eyes. Aha! would there be something in the whisper which had got around? The merest trickle of a whisper about her and the handsome guest. He looked to the north whilst Molly, on the verandah, kept an eye on the front gate, in the hope of a straying Fighting-Bull passing.

Built by some optimistic rubber pioneer and inhabited for three decades by a broken line of rubber optimists, the Bungalow stood in a big compound. And none too badly cared for. Hicks, as the finest referee the Malay had ever known, held an important position in the eyes of the Villagers, their friends and visitors from round about. When drunk the ever sober men of the Village looked after him good-humouredly, the women when he was sober. The former kept the jungle back from the high and stout wooden fence and the compound comparatively clear of the persistent and luxuriant vegetation which came up all in a night. Foreign vegetation, also. A tasteless plant called lett-iss and other strange greenery. Proud the Tuan was, too, of his lett-iss. Of its delicate green leaves. Six rows there were and just ready to be pulled. Before the next sunrise. He loved his briar-bush as much. A scrubby-looking affair with a poor flower but of leaves which softly scented the air. The women tended his mosquito nets, bed linen, a pile of sarong and silk jackets, table linen and strange foreign body linen. He might play

the goat when elevated by a fiery liquid called wiss-kee but he was caste for all that. Might he not have been of noble descent in the home country he seemed to have entirely abandoned? Noble or not he knew every trick and turn of the Bull-Ring and every evil trick and lightning turn of the Fighting-Bulls.

He had once described the bull-fighting of his own part of the world. A dull affair that, in which men flapped a red sarong to infuriate the bull whilst others, mounted or on foot and armed with spears, stuck the brute's back with the weapons, until it looked like a foreign pincushion, then chased it round and round the Ring until it fell dead of a broken heart or loss of blood. Indeed a tame sport when compared to two bulls fighting to the death over a cow or just because of the chronic murder in their vicious hearts. You would have thought that one single bull or just one cow would have come to love the old Referee seeing the good care he took of them. The mud-coloured devils! Even if they were for the most part hairless they were fat. Allah alone knew how many 'pikul' Bull One, who had mated these three years with Cow Four, weighed. And Cow Four, the feminine heavy-weight. And Bull Nine. A demon he and Bull One's bitter rival for Cow Four's affections. Monsters, the three of them, and the two Bulls never allowed within bellowing distance of each other.

Anyway there was good hope of a bull-fight before long now that the harlot was back from Singapore. She certainly was the best part of a blot but The Village would be sore bereft without her. Her presence lacking

would mean few visitors, if any, from the big cities, and the Rest Houses empty in consequence. Nor would baskets of broken and unbroken food be handed out swiftly and with secrecy from the back door of her great place, the New-Moon House.

No, there would be nothing but a heaven-sent peace and sense of security to every woman possessed of a handsome male or a plain one with well lined pocket for that matter.

The Villagers sauntered down the far bank of Tiger Stream which ran at the back of the compound. From a knoll thereabouts and climbing it in trios and quartettes, they could catch a glimpse of the verandah where the party from The Island ate their midday meal. Strange the ways of the white races. Trapesing over the water to eat food on a crazy verandah when they could have had it in comfort on that speck of paradise, The Island. They smiled when Molly's gay laugh came ringing over the fence followed by their Referee's. A surprising voice the Tuan Ol' Ik's and with some influence over the cunning water-devils. Bitten with a curiosity roused by Molly's laughter, and unseen by the head of The Village, a slip of a youth crept up the stream's near bank. There was a little frequented gate at the back of the compound. He had made use of it to watch the lett-iss grow, hoping to be able to annex a crispy leaf upon some auspicious occasion. And was not the party infinitely more enthralling than the juciest foreign vegetable? Just a peep at the Lady Kris! He squirmed through the jungle growth and made a dash, the life-lines of more than one entangled in

his slender fingers. The gate opened. The party sat at ease on the old verandah——

One of the party looked in his direction.

He was gone like a flash, the gate left open behind him.

"And there *will* be a bull-fight in our honour, won't there, Uncle Olly, darling?"

"It's close season for Fighting-Bulls and Cows, child." Hicks went warily. Not for the weight of a bull in bullion would he let any white man know how he came by the major part of his fluctuating income. "They're out to grass, the lot of them but not only that. They're as fierce as tigers just now for want of a little sparring and a taste of blood-letting though a dozen Malay kids, headed by a chit called Udang Geragau, which is Malay for shrimp, had a whole day off from school or what they are pleased to call school, to drive the herd up to The Sunset Drinking Pool." He looked at Billy. "There was tiger-spoor round that pool last month, lad." He frowned when Molly flung herself on Billy. "For pity's sake don't wrap your better half in cotton wool, child, that's not the way to fit him for life." He looked at the Lady Kris, so restful in her long-chair, Strong at her left, Day on a stool at her right. "Is it, Day?"

"Rather not. We've all got to find our way through life's jungle and there's a lot in the way of warning to be picked up from spoor even if we are scared to death of the beast so near us."

"Not that a tiger's not a lamb compared to a water-buffalo on the rampage. You might frighten the tiger if

you made noise enough but nothing but death'll pull a gone-mad bull or cow up."

THE FIGHTING BULLS.

Molly sulked, the others drank coffee, smoked and talked, waiting for the ship's siren to summon them, the Villagers went away home whilst Cow Four, followed by faithful Bull One, splashed her way leisurely down stream, sniffing for something green and tasty.

No hound ever picked up scent as she the lettuce odour. She stopped with a grunt and swung her wicked head. Bull One banged his affectionately against her excuse for a tail. She turned and glared at the merry fellow, churning the river mud whilst he rubbed his forelock against her pinky side. Her livid tongue curled over the muzzle which had picked up the lettuce scent. Indeed she might have been licking her horrid lips with pleasurable anticipation. She made a shot at the bank, got almost to the top, slipped and slid back, bringing the best part of the bank with her. Drawing her feet out of the mire with nasty sucking sounds she squelched along on the quest of a better taking-off point. Discovering it, or so she thought, she leapt from an almost sitting position to midway up the bank. There she hovered in extremis, slid back, slid down onto the Bull's bull-neck as he tentatively negotiated the incline in her outsize wake. Finding a certain purchase on this dorsal platform she heaved herself forward, dug her split toes and one horn in, scraped a niche with her rear feet, glared wildly round and gained the summit,

her inamorato in proud proximity behind her. She sniffed the air. He, the poor fish, hit her skittishly in the vicinity of the snake-like tail. She rammed with a great horn but, Bull One mercifully tough owing to a hide which would have put any rhinoceros to shame, made no impression on the hairy, purple flank. Unexpectedly swinging her sloping hindquarters she played him completely off the green at the gate. Alone she did it and alone she entered the paradise where lett-iss grew. Her wicked blue eyes watched the verandah through a thicket of green. Not out of fear, that being an affection she did not wot of. No, she debated whether it would be wiser to clear the humans-of-foreign-odour right off the verandah by rushing them or to make a bee line for the appetising vegetable. Greed won. Felling a small and impeding tree with her forehead on which a kiss-curl frolicked and followed by her bovine swain she daundered up the path.

"What's that?"

"Quiet!"

Hicks whispered, Day sat like a statue of surprise, as well he might, Billy pulled Molly closer and Strong slid along the long-chair.

"What brutes!" he said, "but you're quite safe with me," and put his arm round Christine.

"Pull Christine's beret off, someone." Hicks looked at her red head. "That's our champion Fighting-Bull and his Cow. Two demons. Quick, Strong!"

Strong slid his hand up Christine's shoulder and pulled the red cap. It caught in a pin. Bull One, the red blob looming like a balloon in his eye, snorted and pawed the

ground whilst Cow Four, who only fought to the death in the Spring and then solely with her own sex and because of sex, turned and went to where the lett-iss grew.

"Get it off, Strong." Hicks sat like a statue of suspense. "Hurry. He's going to rush the verandah and if he does and we make a bolt for it he'll be after us like lightning and'll bring the house down like a pack of cards." He sighed with relief when the beret slid out of sight. "Now sit still, absolutely still, and stare him out of countenance. Thank God Bull Nine's not on the loose. If he were we'd have a pukka fight in the compound."

But Bull Nine was on the loose.

As Bull One, having snuffed the steps and eaten the top of the briar bush, turned to join his lady love, Bull Nine came tearing down the towing path, an up and down track trodden flat by hoof and foot. Cunning had got him to the Drinking Pool. His horn had drilled a hole in the mud wall of the stable which kept him safely from his rival. An extra blow had granted him a vision of pastures new. His forehead did the rest. He cracked the wall by and large, stove it out with his head, enlarged the aperture with his shoulders and walked through, a freed terror, at the moment the entire Village cluttered the knoll on the off chance of catching a glimpse of the verandah.

The Drinking Pool his goal, humans the unfailing symbol of trouble, he plunged into the jungle undergrowth, broke his way through the bush and joined the wallowing herd. There, picking up the scent of Cow Four, he was off. Elephant, rhino and giraffe are speedy but it is doubt-

ful if they beat the buffalo intent on getting there. Head down, rat-tail out, he tore along that path. Twice he caught his split toes in a crack and crashed to his knees, jarring his spinal nerves through the impact of his horns with the hard-baked ground. Where Bull One had come up out of the water to join Cow Four he stopped and pawed the earth. His rival was King-of-the-Herd and Lover-of-Cow-Four and owned a chest expansion or, rather, a set chest measurement which had no equal in the Malay. There was all that to his credit but against him Father Time and the best part of a 'pikul' less in tonnage.

He bellowed a challenge, a sound shades sweeter than the Battle Roar, then, butting a rock with his great horns, was off whilst a roving village lad sped to The Village with the jubilant news of probable trouble amongst the Fighting Bulls. At the spot where The Lovers had gone down to the stream Bull Nine paused. He had lost the scent. He went down into the water. Came up. Cow scent all about but not forward. He retraced his footsteps to find Cow vibration going the wrong way. He turned and pegged off down the tow-path but without heart and really only to be doing something. And then! oh, rapture! Cow scent coming up the bank. Lots of it—and—yes, Bull scent, too. His rival's unforgettable and unforgivable aroma. Enough to send a love-sick fellow off his feed for good. He tore into that scent, head down. He tore up to the gate and looked through just as Bull One joined Cow Four at the juicy foreign vegetable and the verandah-party, beckoned by Hicks, got ready for precipitate flight.

Bull Nine pushed with his shoulders, broke both sides of the gate in and without stopping to weigh matters rushed the verandah. Steps a novelty he bit the dust half way up and slid back, one horn entangled in the carved wooden balustrade. Jerking his tremendous head sideways as he sprawled upon the steps he broke off part of the rail. With that impaled upon his horn he scrambled up the steps and rushed the verandah as Hicks slammed and bolted the door. Scenting 'foreigner' behind it Bull Nine, shedding the balustrade, rammed the door with his mighty head until the panel cracked. With the top curve of a horn he smashed the panel in. The odour of 'foreigner' smote him through the loophole. His head, reinforced by his tonnage, a prospective battering-ram, he backed, to charge, just as a bronze shrimp of a girl-child called Cow Four.

Aged five, clad in a bit of a sarong, a scrap of a jacket and the rest, in miniature, of the Malay toilette, Udang Geragau, the Shrimp, loved Cow Four and Cow Four her, as far as it was possible for a beast of that category to love at all. The Shrimp brought the Cow tit-bits. In return the Cow, when smitten across the cheek, would proffer a horn as a stirrup-step and The Shrimp once astride her vasty neck would go where the imp ordered. Hicks and others gingerly scrutinised Cow and calf through the stout wooden bars to her pen. The Shrimp squeezed through the bars and fondled the calf's ears whilst the bovine mother sniffed her hand for tit-bits. Shrimp disliked Bull One intensely and favoured Bull Nine. One of the crowd which rushed to the Bungalow at the news of

trouble amongst the Fighting Bulls she saw Cow Four with the hated Bull One but failed to locate Bull Nine.

"Lembu! Lembu!" she called and held out her hand at the gate.

That tore Cow Four between two types of greed. The juicy green crisp in her mouth or the tit-bit which never failed her when The Shrimp called Cow! Cow! Which? She had to choose between two gastronomic stools. She did not hesitate. Having eaten two rows of lettuce, top, root and sod, she plumped for the tit-bit and dropped into the bloodiest bull-fight ever witnessed in the Malay. Bull Nine, on the verandah, saw her slouch off towards the gate. Consumed with love he crashed clean through the rail after her. Reducing two up-rights to matchwood he landed on his knees, spotted Bull One, sprang to his feet and roared the Battle Challenge, a volume of sound which roused the echoes and scattered the crowd at the gate.

"A fight, my hat!" Hicks opened the door an inch. "The two finest Fighting-Bulls in the Malay." He opened the door wide. "You're perfectly safe in here. You wait and I'll try and wangle, I mean I'll try and get someone to wangle the lot into the Bull-Ring. That's neutral ground, you know or perhaps you don't, then you come along down and see the young bull fight the King of the Herd for Cow and Crown." He arrived at the front gate via the luxuriant undergrowth just as The Shrimp caught the cause of all the pother by the nose ring. "Run her into the Ring, Baby, and I'll give you a new sarong embroidered with silk."

"Ya, Tuan, ya!" yelled The Shrimp and agog with ex-

citement plus the dignity of her position as Cow Leader, smote Cow Four on the cheek, stepped blithely onto the proffered horn and rode jubilantly away on her dangerous errand just as the Bulls, hard on the Cow's track, jammed at what was left of the gate. Bull One swung his hindquarters as Bull Nine charged. The fence on both sides of the gate splintered. They burst through.

"Spread yourselves!" Hicks shouted, caution gone to the four winds in his excitement. "Make a lane to the Ring and keep them on the path. They won't see you."

"Ya, Tuan, ya!" shouted back the Malays.

"What a circus!" Molly laughed. "And what did Uncle Olly mean by neutral ground, Chris?"

Christine explained. Every bull had its own particular milling-ground. Its own bit of sward to which it would endeavour to coerce the opponent. There they fought the matter out. The ground having a great effect on the temperamental Fighting-Bull, made a degree more sensitive than its grosser, everyday brother by over-feeding and segregation, it was the custom in a promoted fight to take the stronger bull to the weaker one's territory. But when two bulls, equal in strength, years and fighting lore, were matched then neutral ground, sward which neither of them knew, was chosen. "The Ring is neutral to every Fighting-Bull in The Village until the day of its big fight. Uncle Olly says neither One nor Nine have been inside it."

"Isn't it a beastly show? worse than Spain's?"

"Not fit for the most hardened criminal to watch, they say, Strong."

"But Squirrel, darling, we'll only just go and have a look at the glad multitude in its joy rags, wait until we see one bull tear into the Ring and then come away home to tea."

"The Malay bull doesn't tear into the Ring. They are lead in by the nose-cord and set exactly opposite each other, then the cord is slipped out of the nose-ring, the cord-holders clear for safety and the bulls charge."

Not always. The Custodian had told Molly all about the drop-doors to the pens. She laughed and described the Ring Old Binatang had shown her the day she had come over with Billy.

THE BULL-RING.

A miniature Coliseum. The arena of smooth, green sward surrounded by a high and tough hard-wood fence strengthened on the outside by still tougher bastions made of hard-wood trunks piled tight on each other and cemented together. On the top of the bastions, which reached to the top of the arena wall and encircled the arena, the auditorium had been built, well above the danger zone.

" 'Keep off my grass!' is the Fighting-Bull's slogan, Mr. Strong." Molly scouted at the gate and came back. "The natives have chivied the brutes down to the Ring but are having trouble in getting them in." She stood on the steps, her life-line, Billy's and the harlot's entangled and knotted. "We'll hear a terrific shout when they do bring it off and then we'll make tracks for the show. Uncle Olly, who *does* seem to know a lot about bull-fights, says the seats

of honour are over what he calls the Compass Boxes, those facing north, south, east and west."

"Why seats of honour?"

Because under those seats were the bull pens. Narrow passages let into the bastion and shut at either end with a primitive but effective kind of portcullis. The sort of thing used in the Middle Ages. Iron covered spikes which snapped smartly down at the crucial moment when the enemy had decided to rush the besieged castle from the moat. Once the bull inside the pen and the preliminaries through with some kindly soul would swill the raging creature through the bars with buckets of hot 'chili-water,' a solution made from the fiery bean and calculated to bring the beast's temper to the point where it boiled right over, after that the drop doors would be raised and out the bulls would rush to fight to the death.

"No, Molly, they very rarely fight to the death. The weaker bull, Strong, lowers its head as a sign of defeat then clears for freedom. The victorious bull chases it for a time, if it has a leg to stand on, that is, then gives up the chase and returns to ride roughshod over the whole herd until challenged in its turn." Day beckoned the others out onto the verandah to listen to the shouting as the bulls rushed down the lane in the wake of Cow Four. "Rosie, as Hicks says The Shrimp calls Cow Four, will be wangled into one of the side pens and the Bulls into the north and south pens, above one of which we shall sit for as long as we can stick it."

"And above the other The Village Tigress, otherwise Harimau, The Harlot, will reign if she condescends to

view the show this afternoon." Molly hooked her arm in Billy's. "There's 'tiger' for you, Bill." She laughed, so happily excited. "If you men want to stay on and wallow in blood and sand, I should have said sward, you can but we two women, of the gentler and more refined sex, will stagger back here, arm in arm and white as chalk, to wait for you." She rubbed her cheek against Billy's. "Will you put my new pyja suit with the coral buttons on Bull Nine for me, Billy, my lad? He's got a good deal less savvy than Bull One, Uncle Olly says, but he weighs a 'pikul' or so heavier and weight's likely to tell."

"What's a pikul?"

"Malay for ton."

"And a stone wall goes down like a ninepin before a blow from a bull's head with the weight of those tons behind it."

Molly cheered at the sight of carrying chairs coming at a trot. At a trot they were taken through The Village built on piles along the banks of Tiger Stream. There was no one about. In its gladdest raiment the entire Village surged joyously to the unexpected treat. The swift journey entranced Strong. Smudges as big as your hand, white, blue, gold, brown and green were butterflies. They flickered in the air or lay like bits of torn silk on wall and roof and bush. As though a patchwork quilt had been snipped in pieces when the wind blew. Parakeets screeched in the trees or flew screeching in flocks from tree to tree. All that was so much a part of everyday to the others was so wonderfully new to him.

A hurricane of noise met them at the outskirts of the

Ring. As Day quoted: 'The Malay loves all things beautiful and pleasant but the sound of his own voice above all things else.' Steep steps cut into the bastion took them up to their seats above the north pen. Day, a friend of the people, went first. Strong helped Christine. Billy and Molly went up arm in arm. There was no sign of Hickory Hicks.

"My friends have come over the water to witness the preliminaries of the Malayan sport." Day's voice rang across the place.

"Bâsah! Bâsah!" shouted the audience in welcome and rising, salaamed, the eyes of the Mohammedan women flashing over the yashmak, mothers touching baby fingers to baby forehead in salutation whilst the Bulls, imprisoned in the north and south pens, bellowed as they strove to turn in the narrow space and failing tried to batter down the drop-door instead.

THE HUNCHBACK.

Harimau, The Harlot, looked down from her roof-garden and called her servants: "There is something happening at the Ring, get my chair," she said sharply and turned to the deformed man at her side. "Whom does The Goat entertain in his hovel?"

The Hunchback counted on long, fine fingers. So wise, so long accustomed to this woman's cruelty, he kept his love for her as deeply hidden as his beautiful head was sunk deep between his shoulders. A twisted soul in a freakish body, toxicology his ugly hobby, he handled his

phials and experimented on anything four-footed that strayed his way, with his thoughts on Harimau. A true Mohammedan, and so a true abstainer, he could not be made to caper as The White Goat capered in his cups. But if he did not caper his pointed chin just topped the table at the harlot's feasts and the more feeble-minded of her guests found infinite entertainment in flipping pellets of bread from a distance between the Hunchback's well cut lips and splendid teeth, not to speak of pulling the high stool suddenly from under him and leaving him swinging from the table top by the strength of his mighty neck and muscle.

A fatalist, he endured it as he would have endured torture to be near the infamous woman he loved so but, a Mohammedan, and so convinced there was no hereafter for woman, saw no harm in pandering to his daily dream of ending his own hell by adding a drop of poison to her cup. He looked at her, slim as a blade in her silk sarong. The wealthiest, the most evil woman in Asia. His thoughts flashed to the smallest vial on the fourth shelf in his hidey hole at the end of the vast compound. A gardener's derelict tool-house, covered with fungi, hung with creepers and fenced by a lattice of fallen trees, their branches interlaced, it was filled to the mended roof with liquid, bottled death. Accessible only to a hunchback, too. Where another man would have had to bend his back Kechil had only to duck his handsome head under the smothering vegetation.

He had tried a drop from the small vial upon a cat enticed to his laboratory by means of a bird limed to a

stick. The cat had dropped dead where it stood. Without a quiver or sign of distortion of its mangy body. It would be heartening to see the harlot drop dead in her tracks one night of festival. Allah knew she mocked him. Not in words. No tongue in the Malay would dare pit itself against his, mordaunt and scathing. No, indeed, her cruelty was infinitely more subtle. She allowed the little man the privileges she allowed her pet monkey. Free entrance to her apartments. A seat at the foot of her bed. Beside her toilet table. Her bath. Her board. At the end of her carrying chair. And that just to show him that in her eyes he was as much a male as her female monkey.

"The Referee entertains the a-jar a-jar, Mistress, the holy one who has nosed this long time upon your heel. A twin brother and sister born of the same hour in the City of The Lion, the Lady Kris and a foreigner new come to Singapura." He laughed. "A white man to whom, in wealth, Harimau, The Tiger, is nothing but a dried well."

"You mean?"

"The richest young foreigner in Asia, Mistress, with a name slightly resembling the full name of the Lady Kris." His description of Strong ended the little man nodded when the woman clapped her hands, smiled when she ordered her ivory carrying-chair and when she came from her dressing-room blazing with jewels and reeking of scent, held his Grecian nose. "A cotton sarong, Mistress, and the tang of the sea would have been a more fitting bait." He touched the satiny strip of bare flesh between her silk sarong and jewel encrusted jacket. "The Gods rocked that young man in a golden cradle at birth, 'tis

said, Harimau, and have since fed him out of a jewelled spoon." He trotted across the room beside her, his chin on a level with her waist. He talked as he ran, climbed into the front of the carrying chair and sat down cross-legged at her feet. " 'Tis not like to like 'twixt man and woman, Mistress. The prince and the beggar-maid, the cobbler and the princess. 'Twas ever thus." He barely touched his cap to the last of the Villagers who hurried on foot and in best raiment toward the Ring. They greeted him with great friendliness but was he not the Court Jester? his cap flashing with jewels, his diminutive sarong and distorted jacket embroidered with the feathers of the humming-bird so that he, too, glowed with irridescent colour in the strong sunshine.

THE PEBBLE.

"I do believe!" Molly pointed to where the spectators at the back stood on their seats the better to watch Harimau coming up the road. "It must be the fight financier! oh, look! it is! Billy, my lad, behold your coveted 'tiger.' No need to go to the jungle." She hugged Billy in her excitement, laughing at the jest of her idle words as the drop-door to the west pen went up with a crash.

The Villagers and their friends from round about salaamed and clapped their hands as Harimau made a triumphal circuit of the Ring, the Hunchback a lump of colour and flashing jewels at her feet. He indicated the north seats with a long index finger on which a great diamond sparkled. "The whites, Mistress. To the east the

little Holy Man and next him the Lady Kris. Next her, and please notice as you pass how very close to her, the wealthy young man of whom I spoke just now. Next him is the Tuan Moll-ee with her brother the Tuan Bill-ee, born of the same hour." He leaned over and hit the near coolie on the head. "The orders of your august Mistress are that you emulate the snail as you pass the north seats." He looked up into the beautiful woman's face. "Behold the prey!" he whispered and laughed when she struck him upon the hump to his back.

As he might have looked at something not quite pleasant in a museum case, Day glanced at the notorious woman as she passed slowly. Christine, at the creature's rare beauty, put her hand in instinctive protection upon Strong's arm. He caught the full brunt of Harimau's seductive eyes. Looking at her as he might at some leper in his path he put his arm round Christine and openly, so ill-advisedly, drew her still closer, as he would have drawn her back from some diseased beggar in the road.

"Drawn blank, O Powerful One!" Kechil whispered and shifted on his cushion when Harimau kicked his aching, crooked spine. "And look at the Tuan Moll-ee's eyes."

A pebble can start an avalanche, a leak can spring a dam. Eyes full of inexperience's disdain Molly looked straight into the courtesan's, melting, long-lashed, their seduction enlarged and augmented with 'kohl.'

Harimau sized up the situation without difficulty. Fearing for their menfolk the two white women sat in judgment on her. The wealthy young white man, because

he was in love with the Lady Kris, despised her, the free and most sought after woman in Asia. She could have struck the Hunchback across the face when he wagged a derisive little finger. But the other? The handsome brother, the twin of the contemptuous sister? He watched her. Aha! Lashes very long and black, teeth dazzling, a very white hand flashing with very big jewels on her heart, or where it should have been, she looked at Billy as she passed. She singled him out. Turned to look at him over her shoulder to find him looking at her. Aha! She looked down, looked up, touched her crimsoned mouth and turned away, plotting her revenge on the little party of contemptuous white folk.

"Billy!"

Molly put her hand on his arm, shook it when he took no notice and felt her heart contract when he frowned and pulled away from her. She looked at him. So did Day from the other end of the wooden seat. The boy was absorbed, lost to his surroundings. He watched the notorious woman, watched the chair pass through the west pen, leaned forward as Harimau came up the south steps and passed his hand over his eyes.

"Billy!"

He turned and looked at Molly. His pretty sister with such a possessive hand upon his arm. He suddenly resented the possession. Passionately resented it. She had always held him. Always been with him. Always followed him about. Always. Always. He looked across at Harimau, flashing with jewels, the Hunchback holding her enormous, jewelled fan. His friend had committed suicide for

Harimau, The Tigress. He had loved her up there in her New-Moon Palace and had blown his brains out for love of her. It was said the woman had got the last cent out of him. Had wrung him dry and thrown him away. But Gough had been her lover. Everyone had known that. For months he had come and gone, come and gone to the big white house up there in the belt of dark, green trees. And no man was a man until he had loved a woman. Not as one loved mother or sister, not as one loved a wife, later. He knew Singapore called him 'Molly' when speaking of him. Not to his face of course, because they respected his father and loved his mother. But he was a molly to them for all that and because he had always fought shy of women. A molly. He! The young fool clenched his hands between his knees until the knuckles showed white. The most famous woman of the East had not only smiled at him in passing but had looked back at him. And her house just a little way along there. He sat there, planning the destruction of his whole life, Day, aware of the poison in his mind, watching him, Molly afraid, ignorant that her babyish effort to pit her caste against the harlot's gutter status had started the avalanche which was to envelope one of them.

Strong noticed nothing. His protective gesture towards Christine he would have shown to any woman in his care. The harlot, as a woman, stood for less than nothing to him. Up to the moment when he had seen Christine on the stairs women, collectively or individually, had not stirred him and even his interest in Christine seemed more like some long forgotten dream waking in his memory and

quite impossible to recall. He glanced at her. She watched the south, where Harimau sat.

The Lady Kris frowned, puzzled at her sudden surge of resentment when the notorious woman had looked at the man beside her. She, who had never given a thought to a man in all her life, had been suddenly overwhelmed, for the second time, with jealousy. A strange, hard, bitter feeling. She took her hand from Strong's arm. In an effort to throw up a defence about herself.

"Who's the handsome hunchback, Lady Kris?" Strong, awake to the defence thrown up against him, took his arm from about her.

"The woman's jester."

"Jester! to that devil!" Strong looked across to where the woman sat, fanned by the Hunchback, then looked about.

THE SPECTATORS.

The first three rows were packed with radiant, chattering, laughing humanity. Malay, Indian, Chinese and here and there a bunch of imported negroid. Children swarmed, the light rail, more by suggestion than anything else, preventing them from pitching into the arena. Sweetmeat vendors passed between the seats as best they were able. Late arrivals, summoned the native alone knew how from scattered hamlet and lone habitation towards the coast and back towards the jungle, came running up the steep steps. Friend called to friend. The front rows squeezed tighter to oblige. Bets ranged from a year's earnings to a single cotton sarong. Women, matrons, maids and mites, took

rings from ears and fingers and held them up. Voices were shrill. There were gusts of laughter.

"Where's Uncle Olly, Uncle David?"

Day had no idea, Hicks seemed to have disappeared into the blue. Strong frowned.

"This is no place for women, Day," he said. "It's bad enough for us men, but it's nothing but degradation for Lady Kris and Miss Grant to be even seen at such a show." He looked at Christine and Molly, up at the sky across which great clouds, like galleons in full sail, swept. "I think it would be best to take you both down to the boat, Lady Kris."

"I've an idea we shall pass the night at the Bungalow, Strong." Day turned to Sunyi who sat behind with Ria. "What do you make of the weather, Sunyi?"

Sunyi shook his head and pointed to where Ombak and his crew sat hunched with excitement. "Not only is the weather against the return to The Island, Excellency," he said, "but I doubt if even the Lady Kris could move those unregenerate from where they sit."

Strong got up, tall and fair in the sunshine. The courtesan watched him. She looked at Billy who watched her. She saw him speak to Strong then look at Molly. The two women spoke together. They got up. Ah! They were leaving the Ring. The men were about to remove their womenfolk from the contamination of her presence. Not if she could help it. She could just see the Referee in the east pen. Hidden from his white friends, the cowardly old goat, he waited for her signal. As Christine and Molly turned to go she raised her right hand. The spectators shouted.

Those in the back rows pressed down upon their more fortunate brethren in front, forming an impassable barrier between the white visitors and the exit. Hicks waved his handkerchief through the bars of the drop-door. The spectators shouted. A sharp order rang above the tumult and the drop-door rose swiftly.

Bull Nine did not wait. He rammed the gate to expedite its opening. Freed of its socket an upright splintered above the iron point. The crowd laughed. The Bull charged into the arena, pawed the soil, flung up his head and rent the air with his challenge to battle.

THE BULL-FIGHT.[1]

Some simple mechanical contrivance from behind the bastion worked the drop-doors. They slid up smoothly and very quickly, there being doubts as to the pointed stakes, even when fitted closely into sockets sunk deep into the ground, withstanding the bull's first frantic plunge for freedom. The crowd sat forward, gripping its knees. The visitors, ignorant of the bloody combat in store for them, watched intently. The door went up so evenly that Bull One, the old timer, trotted out to the middle of the Ring and stood there, black, glossy coat a little ruffled and very wet from the exhilarating 'chili-water,' eyes alight with hostility, pawing up the grass. He sniffed the ground, flung up his head and roared the challenge.

"Diam! Diam!" Sunyi, the gentlest of men, ordering it to be quiet, cuffed a child who screamed at the terrific

[1] Unfortunately witnessed by the writer.

sound. Children whimpered. Women moved closer to their men who took no notice of them. Hicks, to close the north and south pen, waved his handkerchief twice. He should have been sitting up above, too. In the middle of the bench reserved for the Referee in the north Seats of Honour. He hid because he feared Day. Day stood for those Societies which prevented cruelty to biped and quadruped. It was doubtful if any white race could have stopped bull-fighting off the beaten track in Johore but it could most assuredly make it unpleasant for a white man who refereed the hideous show. Unpleasantness allied to interference meant nothing but a loss of caste and without caste no man could possibly expect to master even the lesser intricacies of the native mind. He was sorry the Bulls had managed to get together just this one afternoon. He cursed Rosie, looming large and pink behind the bars to the pen opposite. The female meant trouble all the world over. If it wasn't woman it was cow. A murrain on the sex. The only thing to do was to get through with the fight as quickly as possible. He had arranged for a signal directly the visitors, white to the lips, would rise in disgust to make their exit. He would then hand over the end of the fight to his understudy, make a bolt through the back of the pen and arrive in time to wish his friends good-bye at the boat or give them tea at the Bungalow should anything happen to prevent their sailing.

The Bulls charged.

"The fight begins, Tuan." Eyes heavy with blood-lust, Old Binatang spoke over Strong's shoulder in Malay which Ria, eyes flashing, pretty teeth worrying her full

underlip, translated. "They will not charge much more. They will each try to pierce the other with the tip of the horn which is not sharp but cannot fail to enter the soft part of the neck or cheek with the monster's great weight behind it. That is called Stabbing. When the horn pierces the soft part then the bull will exert its colossal strength to lift the enemy off his forefeet. That is called Lifting. If he succeeds he will hold the enemy bull hanging on his horn until the tremendous hanging weight causes him to fail. He will then drop the enemy who in his turn will stab the Stabber and lift him off his forefeet and hold him hanging impaled upon his horn. And so on and so on until they cease fighting from loss of blood. Then the vanquished will turn and run away, should he have a leg to stand on, pursued by the victor until the latter tires of the chase. That is the ordinary, everyday end to a fight. It happens, rarely alas, that the vanquished falls to the ground. Then the victorious bull drives his horn into some vital part or severs the great artery. Stabbing and Lifting, Tuan, Stabbing and Lifting is the Malay method of bull-fighting."

"We must get the women out, Day."

"Of course. We'll all go."

But there was no possible exit. Benches and gangways were packed to suffocation. On the top bench of all men stood as best they could between the seated whilst behind them, perched on the wooden back to the seats, others sat, their feet on the shoulders of those beneath them, as a support to their precarious hold. Nor could you have passed a blade of grass between them.

"Make way for the Lady Kris! Clear a way for the Lady Kris!"

Old Binatang shook his head, his eyes on the Ring. "Nothing but the end of the fight, Tuan, will move those people from where they sit. They neither see nor hear anything but what is toward in the Ring," he said and took no further notice.

Billy looked at Molly. White as a sheet she twisted her hands nervously in her lap. He put his arm round her and hid her face on his shoulder. "You'd better do the same to Christine, Strong. Day's not big enough," he said shortly.

Strong looked at Christine. She was white to the lips. Her hands clasped tightly in her lap. He put his arm round her and drew her face down against his shoulder. She shivered violently when the crowd shouted. He laid his cheek against her hair. Partly to comfort her. Partly because of his entrancement. "Try and stick it, dear," he said, nor did either of them, bound irrevocably to each other, notice the endearment other than by moving a little closer.

Molly looked up at Billy. He stared across the Ring at Harimau who ate sweetmeats in a none too refined manner whilst talking to a handsome young Malay over the partition of her box. "I can't bear it!" Molly whispered. "I can't bear it!" and put both arms round Billy's neck and began to cry when he took no notice of the caress.

The Bulls met in the middle of the Ring, their heads, forehead to forehead, crashing with the sound of an iron gate slamming. Great horns intertwined they sparred for an opening, moving slowly in a circle, forehead to forehead, churning up the grass into a dull, brown ring.

Bull One, an experienced old fighter and up to every trick, feinted, pulled his head free, dropped it and, when Bull Nine lunged, slashed sideways with a ripping cut. "Ah-ah-ah!" yelled the crowd as the tip of the ugly horn tore Nine's cheek across and clapped their hands when Nine, turning like lightning, ripped One's chest open. Bull One backed, tearing up the grass, staining it here and there with red. Nine, in his inexperience, blundered. A novice at the game, having only fought the minor bulls, a type which had offered little difficulty, he threw back his head and bellowed as Bull One charged. One, wise to the opening, timed an upper thrust and when Nine dropped his head, ready to counter charge, thrust up viciously, ramming his horn into the fleshy part of Nine's jaw, a little under and forward of the ear. Nine screamed, red flecked the foam flying in bubbles on the air, the spectators yelled as Bull One, back on his haunches, forelegs straight as rods, hoofs dug deep into the grass, great shoulders heaving, tried to lift Bull Nine off his forefeet.

"Raise him——"

"Swing him up——"

"Ah—ah—ah——!"

White with rage, almost sick with disgust, Strong pressed his hand over Christine's ear and put his other arm right round her, holding her close. Billy did the same with Molly, instinctively, his eyes the while on Harimau who yawned whilst the Hunchback fanned her.

"One—two—three——"

The spectators counted the seconds in which Bull One would be capable of holding the impaled Bull Nine off his

forefeet. "Ah, weakling!" they shouted when, at the twelfth, Bull One suddenly crumpled up under the weight hanging from his horn. They shouted again and louder when Bull Nine, without a pause, stabbed One in the cheek, drove his horn in, wedged it in and pulled him up, further up, the horn embedded in the soft flesh covered with a hide so strong it could not tear.

"Hold him there, Young One——!"

"Swing him up——!"

"Ah—ah—ah——!"

Mothers held their babes up to watch Bull Nine as he strove to swing the monster enemy off his forefeet. Muscle standing out in knots, like the gnarled bosses to some old tree-trunk, he twisted his ugly head sideways, inch by inch, lifting it at the same time so as to bring the horn on which Bull One hung impaled, up above his head.

"Look at that——"

"Bâsah! Bâsah!"

"Lift him! Lift—lift——"

"Bâsah! Bâsah!"

One's forefeet left the ground. Up he went. A little more. He hung in the air.

"One—two—three——"

The crowd laughed when Nine, new to the game, twisted his head an inch, an inch too much, lost his balance and fell sideways, throwing One clear of the horn. Streaming with blood he was up like lightning as One, streaming with blood, charged. Nine swung sideways to save his chest and bellowed when his flank ripped from shoulder to hindquarter. He turned like a flash, on his

hind feet, in a complete circle and charged, the weight of his tonnage behind him. One, not to be caught, side stepped, got in an upper cut to the cheek, wedged his horn in with the full force of his mighty weight and with an outstanding effort jerked Nine off his feet with a single swing which got the crowd shouting and stamping.

"My new sarong against thy cap on the Old One, Binatang!"

"Taken thou man of little sense. Thine old beast pours blood. Another span of sunshine towards yon bench and he drops to his knees."

"My ruby ring against thine ear-rings on the Young One." Ria, eyes flashing, held the ring up.

Her neighbour laughed. "The Young Bull should be at his mother's side. He is barely strong enough to walk. See. He staggers. Watch him streaming blood." She clapped her hands. "Up he goes. Watch him swing. Up. Up. Up!"

Up Bull Nine went indeed and hung there whilst the crowd counted eighteen to the sound of laughter. Not a movement in the huge monster. Not a twitch of agony. Nothing but the sight of Bull One as he relentlessly twisted his head round. The grass was churned to a dull brown. Blood lay like a thin red carpet upon the brown excepting under the Bulls where it shone in hideous pools. Little puffs of wind brought the stench of blood and of sweating beasts first this way and that. Women's eyes flashed. Men strained against each other. Children stared as they munched sweetmeats. Christine and Molly were motionless, the men, sick with disgust, watched.

"Eighteen!"

Ria's soft voice rang out as Bull One suddenly sagged.

"Just seventeen!" shrilled The Shrimp who had twisted her sarong into a rope in her agony of mind over Bull Nine whom she had chosen as mate for Rosie in due season. Something had to be done to stiffen Bull Nine to the fight. A little more and he would lower his head, turn tail and run. Her Bull Nine. Rosie's mate. Ah, she had it! There was no help to be got out of the Tuan Ol' Ik. For some reason he seemed to be hiding. Perhaps because of his friends in the Seats of Honour. No, upon her rested the happy mating of her beloved Rosie. The beast's pinky form loomed huge against the bars of the east pen. Surely she would have some sort of stimulating effect on Bull Nine who hung upon the horn like any old hide. The Shrimp fought her way to the front bench and there, violently pushing two males of her own age on one side, made a megaphone of her small, ring-bedecked hands.

"*Lembu! Lembu! Lembu!* Hey! Hey! Hey!" She shouted. "Hey! *Lembu! Lembu!*"

Rosie caught the sound which stood to her for tit-bits. It came somewhere from the front. And on an afternoon utterly devoid of anything sweet or juicy. It came from the other side of a kind of fence which kept her shut in the narrow pen. There was only one thing for it with that tit-bit and that was to go out and get it. Go out and find the little Tit-Bit Maid. She drove her great head against the drop-door. She rammed it with her forehead and when it stood firm backed from it, pawed the ground and bellowed until the welkin rang, to Bull One's undoing and the crowd's ultimate disappointment.

It expected the Stabbing and Lifting to continue for some long time yet. It undoubtedly would have had not Cow Four butted in. The Bulls streamed with blood and sweat, their heaving flanks were slashed, their heads gashed and drilled with shocking holes but there was a good hour's fight in them yet. Curse The Shrimp and Allah smite Cow Four who bellowed in her pen. Bellowed a call near enough the Mating Call to tangle up any bull, even in the midde of his big fight.

See that?

There!

Bull One, besotted with love even in the heat of the battle, had heard the Tit-Bit-Love Call. Back upon his haunches, the better to get the enemy aloft, he scrambled to his feet. A fatal manœuvre. Down went his head. Pulled down to the mud and reddened grass by the weight hanging to it. Cow Four rattled her horns against the bars. Bull Nine slid off the slanting horn and fell sideways. Great chest smothered with red foam, eyes almost closed, knees beginning to knock from loss of blood he made one last effort in the cause of the rosy Cow.

In the intense silence, when hand gripped hand and Harimau, The Harlot, laughing, leaned forward on the cushions, Molly looked up. To find Billy staring across at the laughing woman. As Bull Nine charged, Molly screamed. A dreadful sound in a dreadful scene.

Bull One, facing the pen where Cow Four raged, stood at an angle to Bull Nine, flank exposed. Side stepping as Nine charged, he staggered. Lurched. Nine rammed with his full weight behind the blow. Drove his horn in behind

One's shoulder, low down, near the leg. Drove it in and up so that the snapping of ribs sounded like the cracking of wood.

"Lift! Lift! Lift!"

The crowd, to a man, leapt to its feet. Day pressed the pit of his stomach. Strong wiped his face with his sleeve. The Courtesan, on her feet, pointed, shouting with the rest. The Shrimp, mouth full of toffee and leaning against the rail in her excitement, broke through and fell into the arena. Gathering herself up she ran towards the enemy, sarong flapping round little ankles.

"Lift, Bull Nine!" she screamed. "Lift! Lift!" and stamped in the ugly brown circle.

"Allah protect thee! Allah care for thee!"

Men shouted. Women screamed. Day had one leg over the ledge when Old Binatang, a strong arm about his middle, pulled him back, signalling others to do the same with Strong and Billy. "Leave her be, Tuan." The old Custodian laughed. "Allah has her in His good keeping but not only that. She is a girl and what are girls—and cows? nothing but a source of trouble from cradle to bull-ring."

Molly looked up, so did Christine as the blood-roused crowd swung from side to side.

Bull One was dead, his loving heart pierced by the tip of the great horn, but Bull Nine was of a mind to crown his efforts in the winning of Cow Four. He sat well back, head down, horn caught between the dead bull's ribs. He tried to loosen the horn by shaking his head. You could hear the ribs cracking and splintering like kindling. He

gave that up. The only way to get rid of the dead enemy would be by throwing him clear of the horn. He twisted his head sideways, inch by inch. Inch by inch the dead bull came up from the ground. Inch by inch. That constituted the crowning glory. Just to lift the enemy, alive or dead, clear off the ground.

Just to show Rosie, who battered the door of her pen until the bars cracked as her dead swain's ribs had cracked.

The Shrimp stamped her small feet in the mud and blood. Molly fainted as Bull Nine staggered to his feet, his huge head down, held down by the weight upon the horn. He could no longer see for blood. Choking, he made his last desperate bid for the Cow's affections just as she smashed through the barrier. He put every ounce of what was left of his colossal strength into the task of lifting then throwing Bull One.

Just to show that Cow.

He rammed his horn in deeper then, with cracking muscle and breaking heart, pulled the dead brute clear off the ground, slung his head sideways and, to the shouting of the spectators, pitched the dead carcass on the trampled grass. He shook where he stood. Head down. Streaming with blood and sweat. Flank ripped. Chest ripped. Holes gaping in cheek and neck. Seeing The Shrimp through a red mist, he charged her.

The spectators screamed.

Shrimp shrieked then, wide awake to her peril, up to every bull-ring trick, side-stepped as the great bull reached her. Blinded with blood he passed her, flashed

round on his hind feet and charged just as Cow Four, all rosy and serene, trotted up on tit-bits bent whilst the little maid frantically scooped a toffee-filled mouth with an index finger. Rosie's livid tongue curled round the savoury hand. She totally ignored her bovine knight. He sank to his knees and fell sideways, tongue lolling on the red mud. She prospected the second-hand stickiness with nasty sounds, offered her horn when The Shrimp smacked her flat cheek and, once the imp safely astride her vasty neck, ambled round the ring to vociferous cheering.

"Fainted!" Strong picked Christine up in his arms and carried her down the steps. Billy with Molly behind. He looked back. Day saw him look back. He also saw the harlot make a beckoning movement with her fan.

Hicks met them at the Bungalow with the news that dirty weather would keep them there the night. "We'll just add a drop of something reviving to the lassies' tea," he said, and added, the wily one. "A beastly show. I got stuck at the back and I don't think it'd do any harm if we all added something strengthening to our—er—tea—what?"

BILLY.

Molly woke up.

Shadows divided the room. Deep purple stretched from the floor, on which the two square mosquito nets stood out like small white tents, to midway up the bare plaster walls. A silvery heliotrope spread like a fine wall-paper from midway up to the slats which let air, light and insects in near the ceiling. The arch to the dressing-room and the

arch to the bath-room looked almost triumphal so high they loomed above the line dividing the two shades of darkness. Billy slept in the bed next the door but Molly knew he was not in bed.

Eyes still red from weeping, she sat up, arms round her knees. Billy had deserted her. She thought back, a sorry rearward pilgrimage, to the moment when Billy had drawn away from her. Truly during the fight he had hidden her face on his shoulder but when she looked up now and then it had been to see him staring across at the infamous woman. The evening had seen his customary charming manners gone to pieces. His suggestion for a moonlight ride turned down he had sulked. Refused to make a fourth. Refused to dance and had gone off suddenly to bed. Long before Molly and in the middle of Hick's racy, fascinating stories of roundabout there.

The Bungalow was big enough but the furnished rooms were few. That being so they had slept as best they had been able. Christine in a little room at the back. Strong and Day in the corresponding room on the other side of the house. Hicks, alcoholically mosquito-proof, in a hammock on the verandah. Molly and Billy in the same room.

Molly had asked Billy to brush her hair. Half way through the ministration he had flung the brush down and got into bed. Without kissing her. Her Billy! Headache the excuse for his boorishness. Bill who had suffered neither ache nor pain worth mentioning his life long. She looked at her watch. It was long past midnight. She got out of bed, a determined slip of a thing in festive pyjamas. She went to Billy's bed. The curtain was well tucked in, a

sign he had intended deceiving her, hoping, should she waken, she would believe him near her. Angry, hurt, she stood there until fear swept the hurt right away. Billy had fallen under the spell of the woman who had brought ruin and heartbreak to the Peninsular. Gough, handsome Basil Gough, so often her partner, had been the last to commit suicide for Harimau, The Malayan Tiger. And now Billy under her spell. She did not hesitate. Her soft slippers made no sound but Day, also working out the Billy problem, heard the rustling of the reed blind when she lifted it to go out into the compound.

"Molly—Molly, dear!"

"Oh, Squirrel, darling!"

She put her arms round Day's neck and, young, burst into tears whilst he patted her shoulder and asked to be told all about it. Well, well, what a fuss! He mopped her eyes with a gay pink handkerchief which matched the pink-silk edge to his cream-silk pyjamas. Because the moonlight ride had been turned down Billy had gone out for a stroll on his own. That was all there was to it.

"He's not! He's gone to that woman." Molly spoke flatly. "He's gone out because he's fallen for her. You know he has. You saw her give him the come-hither this afternoon and he's gone." Molly looked at Day. "You know it's true. You saw her glad, didn't you?"

Day had to make an instant decision. He passed his days doing it. Indeed of such life seemed to be made up. The Peninsular and Archipelago periodically held the scales for him to tip. For wife against husband or the other way about. Between this family party and that.

This capitalist and those coolies. His religion made no difference to the warring factions. Mohammedan, Buddhist, Hindu, Jarvanese, Goanese, Malay, Chinese. They all called him in and as a rule at the last hectic moment of the eleventh troublesome and fleeting hour. That case up country when, supplied with a sketchy outline of the crime, he had been asked to pass sentence on the instant. The cattle stealing in remote corners. Incidents of adultery, kidnapping and abduction. And worse. Far worse. The simply dreadful happenings of the ports in reaches so low they escaped the authorities only to land into his hands. And the majority of the cases to be decided this way or that within the hour of his arrival and departure.

Now this.

To decide whether it would be best to agree with Molly over Billy's fall from grace or to deceive her for a while longer. To give himself time to take a hand in the lad's salvation, for the good of both brother and sister. He decided instantly on the deception. He had come across too many young fellows in the throes of their first so-called love not to have recognised all the signs and symptoms in Billy. Restlessness had beset him during the fight. Sulkiness had evolved from that and later in the evening had turned to positive churlishness, especially towards his sister. Believing the lad quite safe with her he had been thankful to see him go off to bed.

Now he was scared.

The woman lived on the other side of the compound wall into which had been let a small door known as The

Harlot's Gate. He guessed Billy had gone out to find the door leading to adventure but there would be no possible good in letting Molly into the secret. She would in all probability make a scene which would bring the servants running and that would be tantamount to broadcasting the escapade throughout Asia and the world. But what there was to be done must be done quickly. The woman's spell was an insidious poison to which some found no other anti-toxin than death. Had he, or anyone, known of Gough's first infatuation for her, the handsome fellow might have been prevented from committing suicide in his bathroom.

He looked about. Nothing stirred. There was no sound. The world slept. At least it seemed to. The East never really slept. Her nights were full of eyes and ears and noiseless feet. He whispered to Molly and pushed her down into a chair. If Billy had not gone for a stroll then he had gone to find Singa, the great authority on 'tiger.' To make plans for the 'shikar' he had had in his mind this long time. "I'll bring him back, child. I know exactly where to find him. And you sit as still as a little mouse. One sound and Uncle Olly wakens. He sleeps like jungle fauna, one eye open and both ears all out for the faintest rustle." He patted her cheek and lifted the reed blind, listened, looked about and crossed the verandah, light on his feet.

But he did not go down to The Village where Singa, the 'shikari' lived. Watched from the verandah by Molly he turned to the east in the shadows and went straight to the door in the wall, to The Harlot's Gate. He had been

there quite often before, hoping it would prove an opening through which to attack the courtesan. It had always been closed and locked. He touched it now. It gave. Sick with anxiety he pushed it gently. It opened without sound. A faint path showed through the tree-trunks. The tops of the trees rustled in the north wind. Great creepers, slung like hammocks from bough to bough, swung in the shadows or moved like folk in green dresses dancing round and round and round. The wind blew the clouds along so that the moon looked through the leaves now and then. At a line of white, balloon-shaped flowers like frightened faces peeping; a night-moth, larger than the hand, flickering its silvery wings; a monstrous brown toadstool; the phosphorescent eyes of something furry watching from behind a bush.

Day flashed his light over the door in the wall. Yes, there was the impression of broad fingers in the fine fungus born of humidity and spread about in purple patches edged with green. The impression of broad footsteps on the path sodden with vegetation which never ceased to drip.

Drip. Drip. Drip. The everlasting little splash sounded like—— Drip. Drip. Drip. It never stopped. It had a horrible sound. It was warm when it fell on hand or face. Horribly warm. It was a suggestive sound. It felt like——

The little man of God stood with his hand on the door, listening to the never ceasing dripping, watching a procession pass along the sodden path. Up and down. Up and down. Headed by his brother it passed up and down the ugly path. Men and women. Youths and girls. Their faces,

every one, covered in a fine fungus of depravity which even death failed to cleanse quite away. His Nuts. This man. That woman. Retrieved from the gutter. The native hut. The edge of the jungle. The jungle itself. This obscene dancing house. That brothel. This soul. That soul. Behind them Gough, the handsome fellow. Others following him. The Soul-Nuts he had failed to gather into his Nut Basket in time. He shivered, stepped back from the door in the wall and wiped the warm drops off his hands with his pyjama jacket.

His twin brother at the head of the dreadful procession. Gough at the end and behind Gough, a good way behind, Billy, his fingerprints on the door to adventure, his footprints on the ugly path of sin.

The little priest made no sound as he walked under the trees but Kechil stopped working, a test tube in his long, sensitive fingers. He blew out the light and tiptoed to the door, a blot in the gloom. Nothing. No sound. Had a tree creaked perhaps in the wind? He shut the door, lit the light and continued experimenting on something furry he had beside him in a strong cage.

Whilst Day went warily.

Where did the servants sleep? did the woman entertain or was Billy alone with her? He stopped in a belt of cypress which stretched in a half circle from the far end of the ugly path. He looked through the trees at the house. A lovely structure built for the woman by a famous American architect who, succumbing to her wiles, had designed her a house in return for her favours and ridden safely away. Designed as a new moon, built of white marble, it

had been set in the dark cloud of cypress trees. A roof-garden sparkled with lights under silken awnings. A fretted marble balcony encircled each french-window. A double sweep of steps, shallow and wide and shaped like the sickle moon, came down from the centre of the roof-garden to the white marble court where fountains played. The court looked like a patch of snow from which slender alabaster pillars sprang to hold the silken awnings. There were inlaid or jewelled chairs and stools. Tables of ivory, ebony and hard-wood. Cushions and in the centre a cock-pit railed off with a silver cord. The back of the house was a heap of untidiness, after the manner of most Oriental dwellings both great and small. There the servants teemed. The stables, further back and out of sight, sheltered the woman's lamentable taste in horseflesh; the famous pale-grey elephants which wheedled strips of sugar-cane out of their 'mahout' in return for helping push the jungle back or, painted, jewelled and bedizened, went to meet the more favoured of the guests; the latest thing in cars in which Harimau betook herself to Singapore over the splendid road she had been given permission to make so long as she kept it in perfect order.

In that white court Gough had sat with the courtesan to watch the cock-fighting. Up those long, new-moon stairs he had walked to find her. At the foot of those stairs, looking up at a window from which the sound of women's voices came, Day saw Billy standing, his hand on the rail, a foot on the first step. There had been no one to stop Gough at the foot of the stairs. Day ran across and caught Billy by the arm as he moved a step up.

"Oh, go to hell!"

It took a long time, no little diplomacy and a great deal of skill to get Billy back to the path. He was furious. At the discovery of his secret. At what he was pleased to call Day's damned interference. At Molly. He raved. Especially against Molly and then, the poison working, against society, life and codes. In fact against everything decent but happily in a whisper which the wind mixed up with the rustling leaves so that the sound escaped even the lynx-eared Hunchback.

FOR AND AGAINST.

Before Billy ended raving against all things decent Molly came to the end of her patience. Very quietly, but not so noiselessly she did not waken Hicks, she crossed the verandah.

"What the devil?" Hicks said and loud enough to waken Strong who got up to find Day's bed empty.

Hicks watched Molly through the mesh of the hammock he wore wrapped about him after the manner of the chrysalis its cocoon. Molly going towards The Harlot's Gate, and alone. Then where was Billy? How had she been able to stir in her bed without her twin brother becoming instantly aware of it? He slipped out of his hammock with the ease of long practice and stole into the house, a quaint figure in warped pyjamas. He looked into the men's room. Strong's bed, near the door, was empty. Billy's bed was also empty. Then did the lad stalk Molly or the other way about? No, of course not, Billy and

Strong had evidently gone out together? Why? had that woman laid her spell on them both?

What a day! what a life! the harlot in tearing tantrums over Molly and swearing revenge. Bull One dead and Bull Nine so badly battered there were grave doubts as to his recovery. The possibility in the event of the beast dying of some fool from The Village tearing along with the glad news and so giving away the Referee's secret to the redoubtable Lady Kris. He shook his head. Day was given to nocturnal rambling, it was the only time he had to himself, but he was surprised at Strong. He liked the fellow and would have given him credit for a better discrimination in women, young though he might be. Not only that. The nocturnal jaunt, under the circumstances, was nothing less than an insult to Christine who was as far removed from debauchery as the earth from the stars. The death of Bull One had knocked the Ring edgeways but to have two pukka white men hanging about The Harlot's Gate was infinitely worse. It put the lid on the worst day of his none too radiant life. The only thing necessary to jam that lid down tight would be for the Lady Kris to find out about the escapade.

That would be a vast pity as well as a disgrace.

It was time the girl wed. To his mind the unwed woman was not only a loss but a menace to society. Could anything excel or equal *hunger* as a law-breaker? And what was an unmarried woman? nothing but a *hungry* woman. The childless married woman was a disaster in the same orbit. He had said nothing to Day and Day had said nothing to him but he knew all right that the little man looked

with favour upon Christopher Strong as a possible mate for Christine Still.

And now this to upset everything.

As he pattered after Molly, Hicks wondered what the young men of the present day were coming to. A little more and doubtlessly they would be seen openly and unashamedly in the company of loose women. But he was very surprised at Strong. An almost rabid prohibitionist in such unconsidered trifles as tobacco and wine here he was breaking every law of decency in the worst possible way. Of course there was his parentage to take into consideration. No one knew who or what his parents had been. A risky thing adoption. Who was to know what the foundling might not have inherited in the shape of criminal instincts? The kind of crime for instance that got mixed up with low-caste women. He stopped and looked back at a sound on the verandah. The very worst had happened. Christine had heard the commotion and was coming to investigate. Yes, there she was at the door.

A lovely creature.

All in white. Long kimono sleeves to the ground almost, like folded wings and the white satin wrapper all twisted up in lovely folds at her breast so that what looked like a pink-silk nightdress showed, swinging a little over her embroidered silk shoes as she walked. And her hair. What a delight. What a throwback to the days when woman was an individualist with her hair in a lump on the top of her head or in a bun in the nape of her neck or puffed with curls or bound in plaits instead of being prison-cropped. Her hair reached her knees in two thick plaits

and she wore swinging drapery instead of the trouserloons which so grievously advertised both the fatness and the leanness of feminine kine.

What a pair she would make with Christopher Strong.

Curse the man for his unseemly behaviour! However, with a little tact and tacking the frail craft of their mutual interest might be got safely over the very thin ice onto which the young man's regretable search for adventure had pushed it. How sweet she looked, the Lady Kris, who had such an aversion to marriage and that because, so Janet Grant said, of some idiotic notion of twin obsession. An absurd theory in this case seeing that the twin had died a few hours after birth. He must try and inveigle her indoors. He moved and drew back as Christine stepped back at the sight of Strong, in a silk dressing-gown, coming through the compound from the west.

"Why, Lady Kris!" Strong looked up at her from the foot of the steps. "The whole bungalow seems to be abroad. Day's somewhere. I woke up and found him gone and came out to look for him. The hammock's empty of Hicks and you standing there just like the moon waiting to walk down the steps." He held out his hand. "Won't you come down?"

"Come up to me," Christine said and leaning down put her hand in his.

"Symbolically?"

"Actually at the moment as there's nothing to be gained by running after straying folk in the damp. And I want to talk to you about your laboratory." She waited for him to arrange the cushions on the wicker chair and sat down.

"I have a very great mind to offer you, rent free of course, the ridge, the plateau in the North Cove——"

"Oh, Lady Kris!"

"Wait!" She held up an admonishing finger. "Have you heard the famous Eastern epitaph?"

"Rather! 'Here lies a fool who tried to hurry the East.' "

"Tell me exactly what you intend building and I will tell you the one thing against the laboratory in the North Cove or any part of my Island."

Strong drew his chair closer to hers the better to show the design he drew in the floor-dust with the aid of a twig. The laboratory was to be a one-storeyed stone building lined with damp and insect proof panelling. In three sections. Testing, 'cultures' and general work. A library and repairing room on either side but quite apart from the main building. At one end of the ledge comfortable quarters for the scientists or students. The servant quarters at the other.

"Beri-beri and bubonic, Lady Kris. Malaria and elephantiasis. The Almighty alone knows what a blessing to mankind your Island might not become. The scheme should start on Hope Island so that the blessing falls straight on you but once built we might lap over onto that other island to the north. I mean push the lesser scientific fry over there whilst I live in the shadow of your gracious presence forever." He laughed. "Now tell me the objection to building a house to the glory of God in the North Cove."

Christine shook her head. It sounded so trivial. In

comparison with his idea of a house built to the glory of God. She explained how for days, sometimes for weeks, she was overcome with a dreadful depression, an unsurmountable loneliness. She lifted the thick plaits of her hair as though she would lift the weight which pressed upon her at times. She could not bear people near her then. She sent out no invitations. Accepted none. Cancelled those she had made. She told him about the unattached women who had offered to look after her when her mother died. "I should have to install a chaperone if you came to live on The Island you see. I am my own mistress and I do exactly as I like but I never have and I never will fly in the face of convention." She looked so grave in the light of the coming dawn. "I am proud of my work on The Island, proud of my rather unique position as employer, but I am prouder still of my name." She looked at him. "I would rather die, any time, than bring or risk bringing disgrace upon the name of Still." She pointed in the direction of Hope Island. "Over there, Mr. Strong, my twin brother is buried. Now I believe that those who die in babyhood grow up on the other side. I mean that they become men and women and don't remain babies through all Eternity." She clasped her hands. "I have never told anyone, not even Uncle David to whom I tell most things, but I am perfectly convinced that my twin brother will meet me as I go through The Door. And as I do believe that, I try to live so that I shall be fit to be with him." She put her hand on her brother's arm and smiled a little when he covered it with his. "My brother died sinless. He will be very far along The Road. I want

to be as clear of sin as it is possible for a human being to be when I meet him. There would be no question of sin, of course, in our being alone together on The Island. I did not mean that. I know you will understand. But the East is just packed with gossiping tongues. One slip on my part and the stout missionary name of Still would be in the mud with just lots of muddy things."

The sky broke as they threshed the matter out. A wood pigeon flashed by. An argus pheasant called from the jungle. Watching them Hicks scratched his silvery head. How puzzling. Day had also been struck with something familiar in Strong. He thought it was in the way the young fellow moved. Day suggested that Strong might have picked up some of Lowth's rather pronounced mannerisms. That might, indeed, be the explanation and thank the Lord the young man had not seen fit to insult the Lady Kris by ferreting round The Harlot's Gate.

And where were Day and Billy and Molly?

THE COLLISION-MAT.

Shivering with misery and damp, shoes pulp, heart full of foreboding, Molly stood in the gateway looking up the path, listening to the drip, drip, drip of the trees. Her Squirrel had taken the track which led to the door in the wall and to nowhere else and Harimau lived on the further side of the door, up along the ugly path sodden with the trees' never ceasing dripping. Dawn was breaking. There was a slip of fawn to the east through the trees. An elephant trumpeted. An eerie sound in the dusk. Perhaps

one of the pale-grey elephants Uncle Olly said went down to bathe at dawn. Molly's faithful heart leapt. Had Billy come out to see the pale-grey elephants? There were none of any colour in Singapore. If he had he would of course have taken the shortest cut to the stables. Through The Harlot's Gate, instead of along by the wall, and up the ugly path sodden with the drops from the trees. Drip. Drip. Drip. A horrible sound and the drops so warm to the hand and face.

She shivered from head to foot. Basil Gough must have come through this door. Perhaps the first time when he went to find the woman. Perhaps the last dreadful time when, ruined and desperate, he had left her house followed by her mocking laughter. And then he had shot himself. That dreadful, dreadful dripping sound! Covering her ears with her hands to stop the sound of the everlasting dripping she failed to hear the two men coming.

"For God's sake, dry up!"

"I won't dry up!" Day spoke sharply. For the peace of more than one mind he had to bring the boy round to his way of thinking, had to get his promise to make some good excuse for his night's trapesing before they reached the Gate. So far no good excuse had presented itself. For what other than the real reason would a man be roaming the harlot's garden at that hour? He held Billy by the arm. He had caught sight of Molly through the trees, her hands over her ears, the dawn flaming behind her. He had also found the necessary excuse in an elephant's trumpeting. "There's your excuse, Billy. That elephant. You came out to see the elephants go down to the sea for their

pre-breakfast dip." He laughed when Billy swore he would never use a lie as a poultice to Molly's outraged feelings. "Lie, my dear fellow? Don't be a fool. That's not a lie, it's a perfectly justifiable collision-mat. What on earth d'you think the world would be like if we all charged about shouting the absolute truth? Why, you'd be telling Molly she was nothing but a very trying jailer and I'd be calling you a young cad." He flashed a glance at Billy's very young face. Its crimsoning registered a hit. "God knows you've insulted the Lady Kris and your sister enough already but I'll tell you something else. Singapore to a man will cut you dead when your idea of decent behaviour comes out. As it will come out if you don't do as I tell you." He put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Come on, Grant. There's your sister at the Gate. There's no inoculation for that rough and tumble known as calf-love. Everyone goes through it but when I've thrown a little more lime-light on that devil Harimau you'll be jolly glad you've come back through this door the same as you went through it. Or however it is old Omar's got it down." He shook Billy. "Come on, man, laugh, yawn. Say you've had a thin time or anything else you can think of to keep Molly's heart from breaking and the Lady Kris from suspecting." He laughed himself, a jolly, ringing sound which brought Molly running up the path. "Put your arm round her and kiss her. Go on. *Laugh!*"

Billy kissed Molly when she clung to him. Told the tale, too. Clumsily enough though Molly's ecstatic heart prevented her from discerning between genuine and fake. They laughed as they walked to the Bungalow arm in

arm. They all laughed at the picnic breakfast. Everything was so completely open and above board. Billy had been after 'elephant.' Pale-grey ones. Not 'tiger' or she-devils or other claw-bedecked feline.

TITTLE-TATTLE.

The furry thing in the strong cage dead, Kechil shut up shop. Molly's gay laughter brought him under the boughs to The Gate just as the picnic breakfast party got up with a view to a few hours' sleep before the siren summoned them to The Tub, afloat in calm waters. He watched them. All in their night attire. All so gay in the coming day. Such laughter. Such attention shown the women by the men. Allah, they should have been Mohammedans. That would have given them an insight into the real status of woman. An ordinary woman, of course. Not a pampered demon like his mistress who slept in a scented room on the top of a quantity of cushions.

She!

The gutter girl who had once scraped the ports for a living!

He watched the picnic party enter the house then went away home, climbed the new moon stairs, one step at a time, climbed onto a chair and perched himself on the harlot's bed. She woke and cursed him for a half-witted monkey. He walked over the bed, sat down beside the big, flamboyant cushions and twisted her perfumed hair round and round his long fingers until she hit his hands down.

"The Goat swings in his hammock, Mistress," he said, his eyes on the figure slim as a snake under the silk cover. "The brother and sister went away to their bed-chamber with their arms round each other. The little Holy Man sits wrapped in what looks to me like that waste of time called Christian Prayer——"

"And the rich, handsome foreigner?"

The Hunchback walked across the bed and jumped to the ground, little body steady on normal sized feet. "He conducted the Lady Kris into the house, Beautiful One. Probably to her bed-chamber as the white races' method of courtship is so strangely different to ours."

"Courtship?"

"The Tuan Kris is besotted with love of the Lady Kris, my Mistress. How do I know?" The Hunchback busied himself with sherbet in a long glass whilst putting into his words the poison he ached to mix into the drink. "How does one know which will mate with which in the Spring? by the male's air of possession, Harimau." He trotted to the bed, the sickly concoction fizzing to the brim. "The Tuan Kris had no eyes for the Malayan bird of gorgeous plumage last noon but this dawn he longs to hold the white English pigeon to his heart." He laughed when the woman flung the contents of the glass into his face and turned at the door. " 'The eye of the sweet potato must be planted in the appointed season and the seed of wisdom dropped upon good ground otherwise will the harvest of both be poor,' " he quoted and shuffled from the room to wash the sticky mess from his handsome, angry face.

CROSS-ROADS.

PERPLEXITY.

THE TUB was wangled into port between two dirty spells from the north after which Christine left her guests to do exactly as they liked.

Molly made a gallant effort at believing things to be as they always had been whereas in her true heart she knew perfectly well they were not. Indeed most things nice lacked in Billy at the moment. His cheeriness had melted under the blistering heat of his first infatuation. He was morose. Mooned about and more than once Day had seen him climb to The Look Out.

Day and Strong foregathered. They explored The Island. Examined the North Cove in detail and decided it was indeed the site for the laboratory. They crossed to the smaller island further north. It would do for the lesser scientific fry but a ridge from east to west across the southern end, completely blocking out Hope Island, made it no sort of place for anyone so consumed with a desire to be near someone else as Strong was to be near the Lady Kris.

On the off chance of seeing her he was up and about long before the others. Hung around the place with the same faint hope and just managed to hide his annoyance

when Day, delightedly wise to the manœuvring, happened cheerfully along to remove him to some remote part of The Island where there would be no possible chance of even catching a tantalising glimpse of the owner. Strong passed a sleepless night trying to fix a name to the affection he felt for Christine. It was more than friendship. Friends he had. Good friends. Love? He had never been in love. He had read a little about it. Just enough to make him wonder what the feverish unrest was all about. Gresham and Trevor had fallen desperately in love. The first with his housemaster's daughter, the other with the tousle-headed damsel in the tuck-shop. Their description, detailed and tedious, of the affection had sounded crude, immature and unconvincing. Any amount of people had seemingly fallen in love on the boat coming out. They had passed the time in being together and as near together as they could very well get. Dancing, sitting out, leaning on the rail, watching the stars, together.

Was then a desire to be close to someone a sign of love?

He wanted to be with Christine all the time. To knock on the Inner Door and go in and talk with her. Sit with her in the room with the seaman's chest and other old furniture in it. He asked for nothing better than to dance with her. He had loved protecting her at the bull-fight but neither then nor when he danced with her had he once experienced the physical thrill others seemed to through love or being in love. He decided that night that he had not fallen in love with Christine yet when he saw her the next day in the plantations surrounded by her head men and the same afternoon talking to the women of the dif-

ferent villages, the children clustering round her, he simply ached to be near her.

He did not want to leave The Island. His visit had extended to ten days but he did not want to leave it. Then or ever. Billy and Molly were due back in Singapore on the first good wind. Would Day go with them? If so he, owing to lack of chaperone about the place, would have to go with them. If that should happen who could tell when he would be back and when he did return whether the Lady Kris would be of the same mind about the North Cove? Could he only get near enough to speak to her he might be able to rouse her enthusiasm to the point of saying something definite and that once brought about there would be nothing easier than to fill The Island with building experts who would take the place of the missing chaperone.

Perturbed, perplexed, Christine kept away from her guests.

She had never been in love. It had never mattered to her whether a man stayed or went. She had heard a good deal about the affection because the girls on the mainland, and of about her age, had seemed to be perennially in love. They had described the symptoms to her in minute and tedious detail. The signs of it had been a distinct falling off in looks and appetite and an increase in a certain irritating restlessness. Her own looks, at the moment, credited her with a sound heart. In fact Ria said she had never seen her Mistress look so radiant. She was certainly restless. Always on the move. Out to the plantations at odd moments, visiting this village, that one, but her appe-

tite was perfectly normal. She liked dancing with Christopher Strong, he danced well and his height suited hers but when he held her in his arms she felt nothing of the physical thrill the girls on the mainland had presumably felt when dancing with the man they happened to be in love with. But she did not want him to leave The Island when Billy and Molly left for Singapore with David Day. How could she keep him? She couldn't. She would rather die than give Singapore a chance to gossip. Could she keep her Uncle David? Hardly. He was due at Borneo or somewhere as remote for a Conference. He had arranged to leave with Billy and Molly and Billy was not only due back at work but had become too insufferably morose to be tolerated. She had talked the boy over with Day. He had hinted at an incipient love-affair.

The world seemed afflicted with love.

It would go hard with Molly when Billy fell in love. It invariably went hard with the left-over twin when the other married or just fell in love. She, of course, could understand that. Had her brother lived she was sure she would have suffered a hell of jealousy had he shown the slightest interest in another woman.

She went to bed this night and went to sleep. Day went to sleep. The whole Island slept when a shadow drew a finger across Billy's shutter.

THE FINGER ON THE SHUTTER.

It made a slight dragging sound. As light, as slight as the paddle had made in the hands of Ular, the noiseless and swift.

Taking the motor-boat well to the north the slim youth had waited for the tide to turn then, the engine stopped, had lowered the canoe and dropped into it. The launch would drift back on the tide to the mainland, the tide combined with his powerful stroke would enable him, later, to overtake the craft as she bobbed about on the strong current. Perhaps with the guest he had been sent to fetch, perhaps not, which last would merit him a beating. He had made The Island harbour without sound, he had made none on the steps up. There had been nothing to stop him. Bolts to doors and locks and keys there were but on The Island doors were never locked or bolted. Why should they be? when the high seas surrounded this Corner of Paradise as the servants, devoted to the Lady Kris, called it.

Billy lay doggo.

After the universal custom of those wakened stealthily all of an Eastern night. He looked through half-closed eyes. There was nothing to be seen. Perhaps some hard-legged insect had perambulated down the shutter. He waited, eyes half closed, thoughts, poisoned by the courtesan, on a speck of light he had seen earlier that evening towards the coast of Johore.

Listen.

A knocking on the shutter, then the french-window opening without sound.

"Tuan!"

So soft the word and a hand outside the mosquito netting like a brown leaf in the dusk. Billy lay still, his foolish heart racing. There was secrecy on the other side

of the curtain. There was no secrecy on The Island. Then—? Could it be——?

"Tuan!"

The hand like a brown leaf in the dusk, beckoned. "Harimau, my Mistress, asks your Excellency to honour her this night. She is alone. She has commanded the jungle-dancer, Tari. He will dance his famous dance for your Excellency. Two as famous Juâra have brought their champion birds to fight to the death in the white court. She prays your Excellency to come. She promises your Excellency shall be back upon The Island before dawn."

Back before dawn, before the world wakened.

Billy sat up, arms round knees, a nice looking boy on the edge of disaster. He thought himself in love with the wanton. He hugged the luscious idea. He was nothing of the sort. Three-quarters his domesticated father and one part his bonny mother, he would one day fall honestly in love, marry and beget him children. At the moment intoxicating adventure called him. The adventure of drinking what he and others are pleased to call 'life' in one glorious gulp instead of by insipid spoonsful. He looked at the communicating door. Molly slept on the other side. His sister who had lately become so wearisome with her persistent mothering and caressing. Men were men after all was said and done though some, like Day, did not seem quite the entire thing. There was a good deal of the celebate high priest about the Day type. Of the world yet not quite in it. There had been no chance of seeing even the beginning of 'life' in Singapore. His people had seen to that all right and there had been no possible loop-hole for

doing it on the quiet in a city where clique met clique on the common ground of gossip.

But here the glorious opportunity for gulping.

Just to be out under the stars. Alone for once in his life. A dash across the sea then on foot up the path which Hickory Hicks had pointed out. A narrow, twisting way, wide enough for a small car, closed at the shore end with wrought-iron gates and covered all the way up to The New-Moon House with a canopy of interlacing leaves. He did not act on impulse as he sat there, arms round his knees. He thought it out as well as his ignorance of the type of she-devil he was up against would allow him. He raised the net and slipped out of bed. "I'll dress in half a minute," he whispered and nodded, putting on his dressing-gown and slippers when The Snake suggested his coming as he was.

Through wisps of wind-blown cloud, which forecasted a high wind in the near future, the stars looked like diamonds wrapped in cotton-wool. The short waves slapped the canoe, an occasional seventh broke over the small cabin in the bows and cascaded down the sides in miniature waterfalls. Ular steered north then, sighting the launch bumping her way home, brought the canoe round and drifted with the tide to the boat. Aboard, they left the canoe to the tide and made the harbour built and kept in repair by the wealthy woman. At the iron gate Billy looked back. The Island showed a black hump in the distance. A light shone for a moment and went out. Had someone heard him? Molly? or Ombak who slept with one eye open and both ears on the alert in the cause of

his beloved Mistress? The wind tangled the tassel to his girdle in the iron trellis. He tried to unknot it as he tried to make up his mind at the last minute of the eleventh hour.

Should he go through the gate which Day had tersely described as an ornamental barrier to hell? should he turn back to The Island, so humdrum and safe? Day had once said that it took a strong man to change his mind at a moment's notice.

"A seemingly strong-willed man's more often than not a man taking the line of least resistance by remaining in the rut hoed by himself or his ancestors. The weak man of leisure will go to England because he has announced his departure and taken his ticket for England and if he did not go to England it would cause comment and a disruption in the seemly order of everyday. Whereas the strong-minded man of leisure, smitten with a longing for Bagdad as he walks up the gangway of the boat which is to take him to England will walk down the gangway and be off to Bagdad."

Thus Day.

THE DUG PIT.

Billy tried to straighten out his mind as he disentangled the girdle. Immature and therefore impatient he pulled the latter free, leaving the tassel hanging there. His hand on the gate he tried to draw back from the trap in his path. Day had discovered the dug pit to him. Had pointed out the cover of green over it. Had lifted the green and shown him the pointed stakes waiting to impale the fool-

hardy who set foot upon the mock grass. His thoughts flashed to Gough. To a certain young Malay. To this one and that one. They had all walked into the trap. Stories of Harimau were an after dinner topic at the Club. The wise elders there gave the length of a barge pole as the only safe and fitting distance between the woman and decent men. The younger classed her with 'tiger' and other such chancy sport. The tourist with the mythical glamour of the East. But to a man they swore her as arrogant as a peacock and well-nigh impossible to please.

He pushed the gate an inch.

Harimau had not only looked back at him, she had beckoned him with her fan. Why? It was said that she, or her head maid, an old body known as Kotok because of a limp to a leg, had the income of every wealthy man in the Malays pigeon-holed in their commercial minds. He had nothing more than what he made in his father's office plus a by no means extravagant pocket-money. Vanity whispered. The notorious woman must have been attracted by him. Vanity pushed the gate a little wider and urged him up the twisting path to where Harimau waited for him, the Hunchback at her feet.

Heavily scented, heavily jewelled, clad in white, she sat on a pile of cushions talking to a couple of 'Juâra' who sang the praises of the birds they held under their arms. Undersized and fanatic, the men, magnificent 'Bar-Taji' or fighting-cocks, the birds. Each armed with curved steel spurs as sharp as broken glass. One a new comer to the world of this so-called sport, the other the Malay champion, a hard-bitten old fellow, tough as hide and known

throughout the East for his colossal endurance. The courtesan pulled the polished feathers, twisted the long, wiry legs then clapped her hands just as the first spy came running from the iron gate near the sea. Kotok, beckoning two mites standing by with basin and towel, pushed them across the court to their impatient mistress and followed them, a clumsy swing to the ugly gait which had earned her the nickname of 'Frog.'

"The Tuan hesitates at the iron gate, Mistress." The spy salaamed. "Twice the Tuan has looked back to the sea, thrice has taken a step towards the House of The New-Moon."

Kechil laughed. Chin sunk on his humped breast he sat thrumming on a small instrument, his fingers, so light on the strings, stained a faint orange from his work that day in the derelict laboratory, his laugh as ugly as the weal which marked his handsome face from mouth to ear. It had cut his heart as well. He loved the woman but he doubted if he could stand much more of her cruelty to man and beast.

This latest fad of hers?

Born, as far as he could make out, of a sudden flare of jealousy for the English girl, the guest of Lady Kris. What did she intend doing with the boy? He frowned and pulled at the jasmine wreath bound about his jewelled cap. Tari, the Jungle Dancer, waited none too patiently. There were coffee, wines and sweetmeats on the tables all about. The Referee giggled unseen in a corner. The Tuan Ol' Ik was very drunk. He had come to discuss the purchase of a new bull to take the place of the defunct. He

had eaten nothing at the conference but had drunk a lot. Allah's curse upon the sot. Sober he was caste, drunk he was not to be trusted out of sight. Allah grant the fumes cleared before the arrival of the youngster otherwise he might participate in an exhibition of a none too seemly kind. Listen. The Old Goat giggled where he lay behind a screen. Once he began to bleat he might come capering in on all fours plus a pair of gilded horns to his venerable white head. And Allah knew that that was an exhibition of senile drunkenness best kept from the none-too-placid whites.

The Hunchback laughed, long fingers so light on the strings.

"The English say, Mistress, that he who hesitates is lost." He played a little tune in minor key, a scrap of a thing born of the hour, a sobbing refrain its end. "And the Malay says 'One step on the grass of a dug pit is a chance, two a danger, three the stake through the entrails.' " His fingers thrummed the strings, his elbow pressed a small phial against his side.

The wound in his cheek throbbed, truly, but it was nothing but the visible sign of the hidden wound to his pride. The woman had struck him, just after sunset, when Ular had returned from the coast with the news that weather might prevent him from getting to The Island. He, the Jester, had laughed and Harimau had struck him across the face with a whip. As she might have struck a coolie. He had run to his hidey hole under the trees, bobbing as he ran because of the weight of his heavy head. He could have killed her a dozen times since. She had ordered him to mix her sherbet, to make her coffee, her

fruit drinks. He could have killed her with each glass but he had not.

He was twisted, he was bullied, despised, mocked and sorrowful but he had a hereafter. Life was a jest. Nothing but a laugh flung up between two puffs of breath to be blown by the wind of chance Allah alone knew whither. Death was another matter. In life he could be with the woman he loved. Wait upon her, play and sing to her, touch her hair, her hand, her silken clothes. Death would see them separated for ever. Woman, born without soul, had no hereafter. No eternity. Death saw her utter extinction. A true Mohammedan, one who neither drank nor smoked, killed, coveted or loved illicitly he would pass to the realms of bliss peopled with 'houri' for the Faithful. He did not want 'houri' in the next world. He loved Harimau in this. The sting of the whip increased, the pain of its throbbing was almost unbearable. The agony of his jealousy was as great. The famous dancer waited. The famous Juâra waited. To do honour to a boy who had neither charm, great good looks nor manners, wit nor wealth. Was the woman infatuated with him? Did she by any terrible chance love him? Wantons invariably fell in love once in their hectic lives. Usually disastrously and making more often than not the most inexplicable choice of man. He did not mind her lovers. Not a bit. They were nothing much more than pairs of shoes. Put on. Worn until their freshness passed then discarded. But love! Not that. Never. Never *that*. His long fingers touched the crystal phial. He would rather see her dead and forever separated from him than know her in love.

The second spy came running, the third, the fourth. Slim youths who made part of the disorder at the back of the house.

"The Tuan approaches, Mistress."

"Having placed two feet upon the cover to the dug pit the stake is now about to stick his entrails." Kechil got up and shuffled to the south of the court, to where two single trees, one on either side of the beginning or the end of the path, made the fine tip of the new-moon belt of cypress trees.

He bowed his handsome head to his misshapen knees as Billy passed and Molly sat up in bed.

THE WARNING.

She sighed and lay down again. Her last nocturnal search for Billy had lead to nothing but unpleasantness. Recrimination on her brother's part, homilies, advocating the perfect liberty of man, on her Uncle David's. Indeed his persistent siding with Billy had ended by enraging her. There was not the faintest suspicion of apron-strings or bear-leading about her love for her brother. She just wanted to be with him and to know him safe and happy.

She tossed. She turned. She could not rest. Just a peep. To make sure Billy was in bed. Of course she knew he was not but just a peep to test this psychic feeling which beset her whenever trouble threatened her twin. How many times had she not proved it right? Been able to help him? What could be wrong with him? He was safe on The Island. Then had there been an accident? Had he

gone out for a walk? The rocks were steep enough and part of the east cliff showed signs of crumbling owing to the storms which drove in from the China Sea. She ran across to the communicating door and tried the handle. Locked. Billy had locked it. She ran along the verandah to his door. Locked. She pressed her face to the window. Billy's outstanding untidiness was apparent. His clothes were everywhere. She sighed with relief. He was in bed. But why the locked doors? She tapped. No answer. She ran back through her room and along the corridor. His door was locked. She knocked gently and called through the keyhole. The key was on the inside, in the lock. She ran to her room, took the key to her verandah door and tried it in Billy's. It turned. Billy had taken his key with him. Perhaps he had gone night-moth hunting. It was the month for the emerald dawn-moth with gold-spattered wings. If that was so he would have a light with him to attract the lovely insects. She made no sound as she ran up the stairs to the roof-garden. There was no light on The Island but a red light bobbed up and down near the mainland. She did not hesitate. The red light, Ular's mistake, was a boat's stern-light. That meant a boat was on its way to the mainland. A boat taking Billy to the iron gate leading to the harlot and disaster. She would waken her Uncle David. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs. She might rouse the whole Island, the native staff, the Malay, Chinese, Indian and all the rest and that would be tantamount to broadcasting the escapade throughout the whole world. She would go alone, prevail with the evil woman and bring her brother safely back. He was so very

little ahead of her. She ran to her room. There was no time to lose but much might be lost by too great a haste. The white silk dress slipped over her head. She shuffled out of it. She might have to hide in the trees. If so in a dark dress she would be hidden in the shadows. Her tennis shoes made no sound on the way down to the harbour.

Which boat had Billy taken? None. They were all there. Then someone had sent for him. She slipped the cable of The Flying Fish, the fastest motor-boat in the Malay. A stunt craft and almost noiseless. She got smoothly out of harbour. The little sound she did make was smothered by the rising wind but Ombak, the serang, stirred in his sleep and sat up.

THE SERANG.

He nudged his wife. "Something's riding the water," he whispered, because it was night-time, because of instinct, life's antennæ. He got up, squat and strong in the dim light, and went outside. Molly rode without lights but the stern-light to Billy's boat shone like an infinitesimal ruby near the mainland then went out. "A boat has just made Harimau Harbour." Light on his feet, The Island's most trusted watchman, he went down to the harbour. "Flying Fish gone." He shaded his eyes. He could see nothing but he heard the slap-slap of the racing-boat meeting the choppy sea. He ran back to dress, pushed his wife back into bed, ordered her to stay there and keep her mouth shut until his return and worked out the problem as he ran down the steps.

Who had left The Island in the first boat and who pur-

sued? He did not know but he would have wagered The Tub to a handful of rice that the she-devil from over there was mixed up in this coming and going. Suddenly enlightened, he stopped half way on the steps going down. He knew. The boat was taking the Tuan Bill-ee to the mainland. The whole Island, at least the Oriental part of it, knew the harlot had sworn to get the boy over there someday, sometime, in revenge for the way in which the Tuan Moll-ee had looked at her the day of the never-to-be-forgotten bull-fight.

Then who pursued in The Flying Fish? The new comer? The Tuan Kris as The Island called him for short? Or would it be the little Holy Man? No. He was certainly good at pulling folk out of trouble and no matter their pigment but he was practically useless on the water. The Lady Kris would have summoned her serang, her most trusted and faithful servant. That left the Tuan Moll-ee. The lass who rode, shot, swam and sailed a boat like a man. His training caught the slap-slap of the racing-boat but infinitely more distant. What to do? or, rather, to whom to go? A shut mouth was the best remedy known for a young man's escapades and the shut mouth was only possible when no woman encumbered the offing. His Excellency Kris being practically a stranger that left the blessed little Holy Man.

Part of the shadows he drew his finger down the shutter to Day's window.

Day sat up, russet hair on end, instinct registering trouble. He dressed whilst listening to the old sailor's tale then, shoes in hand, tip-toed to Billy's bedroom and from

there to Molly's and from there ran as fast as he could to the harbour.

The tide played havoc with their calculations. It swept Molly south. She went about but it took her all she knew and much good time to make the harbour. Ombak steered due north, went about and overshooting the mark drifted south.

" 'Tis not the tide, Tuan," he shouted. "The Chinese would say it is The Dragon lashing the ocean bed in wrath with its tail. I, who know these parts as I know my own hand, say it is the rush of water before some coming storm. Perhaps months hence." He nodded over his shoulder. "Perhaps a typhoon like the monster which heralded the birth of our Lady Kris and her twin brother. This twinship!" He continued talking to himself. "It is a power that none can stay or break. The Tuan Bill-ee is in danger. He does not know it but his twin sister does. Through the love which binds them as the tide binds these coasts with its everlasting waters." He pointed. "I make it, Tuan. I make it but Allah alone knows if we shall be in time."

They were, and Molly, but only just.

WEAPONLESS.

She ran The Flying Fish in between her Uncle Olly's battered craft and the harlot's launch which had all the appearance of having quite lately been out to sea. The rising wind smothered all sound. She had no plans. There were none she could very well make. Nor had she anything but her wits, love and utter fearlessness as weapon.

She was not even sure that Billy had landed there. Trees grew down to the water's edge. Without a sound in her rubber shoes she slipped through the trees to the iron gate. Shut. She felt about for the bolt, the wind blowing against her. She touched something soft and silky. She shivered when it moved under her hand. She felt sick with horror at the thought of the deadly things which crawled and stung and bit. Very gently she moved her hand and flashed her torch.

Billy had passed that way.

The tassel of the dressing-gown she had given him hung there, caught in the iron trellis. She wrenched it free, pushed the gate and ran up the path under the interlacing boughs, that no spy saw her being due to the youths considering their duty through with the moment Billy had entered the court.

She ran until sounds of laughter and applause and clapping of hands stopped her.

She listened.

"Strike! Strike!"

"Now then Little One! Up and down with the spurs——"

"*Bâsah! Bâsah!*"

"The Youngling is completely blinded——"

"Ah-h-h! but he fights on——"

And through the hideous tumult of men enslaved with blood-lust a still more hideous sound. That of Billy's laughter. An ugly, rough, uncontrolled laugh.

The House of The New-Moon stood in a half circle of trees. Planted and trained the trees tapered to a fine point,

to one single tree on either side of the beginning, or the end, depending upon which way you walked, of the path. A shadow in her dark dress, Molly peered from behind the last tree to the west. The servants, men, women with babes in their arms and youngsters at their skirts, stood in a semi-circle at the north end of the court. The courtesan sat on a cushioned stool in the centre, a little away from them, the Hunchback at her feet. Billy, laughing, sat on her left, in the seat of honour. Someone, no, something, a pet, what looked like a goat with gilded horns, to her right. A slim youth in the jungle dancer's loin cloth of plaited fibre stood almost opposite Molly. She only glanced at him. No decent woman allowed her thoughts even to dwell on a jungle dancer.

And what was the matter with Billy?

His ruffled fair hair looked golden in the light of the crystal lamp hanging above the cock-pit. His eyes were dull. He laughed without stopping.

She knew.

Billy was intoxicated.

Molly grew up as she stood there. In one second horror turned her from girl to woman. A girl, she would have dashed across the court and taken Billy in her arms regardless of the enemies surrounding her. Womanhood, so largely composed of motherly solicitude for all those in danger or distress, steadied her. Horror opened her eyes. She was weaponless. Many people carried a weapon of some kind out East. Advocated arms. She had nothing with her with which to threaten the woman, terrorise her into giving up her brother. Had she only been one of those

who carried a revolver. What would happen when the beastly fight was through with? That youth in the fibre loin-cloth? She clenched her hands. No decent woman spoke of the famous Jungle Dancer or allowed her thoughts to dwell on him. She shivered, nails deep in her palms and pressed against the tree-trunk which marked her through the silk dress. She fought a longing to scream for help. She must not scream. She must not make a sound. She could only stand there and wait until the woman should be alone with Billy. She remembered the hunchback. She had seen him at the dreadful bull-fight. But the animal with golden horns? It had begun to bleat. Then it was a goat. Not a human being in fancy-dress. That made one enemy the less. It would not count. And the hunchback? Such a scrap of humanity. Her steel torch was heavy. If she could only come up to the dwarf from behind. But why make plans until the woman should be alone with Billy?

" 'Tis the last round, Mistress." Kechil looked over his humped shoulder at Harimau, at Billy who sat laughing stupidly, sweat trickling down his face. A lad, good to look at in an honest way, his life, his looks, the strength of his limbs in peril this night. How lightly he had come across the court in the bronze and purple gown. A garment the white race seemed to affect to wear over their sleeping attire. The first glass of wine, distilled by Satan, had loosened his tongue. He had talked of love! He had also talked of gifts! Allah hearken! Gifts to the wealthiest woman in Asia. The second glass had flushed his face. The third had stolen his senses right away. The fourth had loosened

his laughter. A piteous sight this boy held up to ridicule because of his sister's too open scorn of an immoral woman. Had Allah but granted woman an hereafter it would, to save this lad's soul, have been the fitting moment in which to let slide a drop of poison into the harlot's cup.

"Nay, 'tis the end of the fight, I fear." The Juâra held the young bird up.

"The end of the fight?" Harimau frowned. "'Tis only the eighth round. A cockerel like that should easily last the customary ten rounds of three minutes each. Indeed, with any heart at all it would force the old one into the twelfth round." She beckoned the man closer and examined the dreadful bird.

THE FIGHTING-COCKS.

Plumage matted with blood, blood drops spattering to the floor, trickling down the man's hands, comb swollen to three times its size, the left eye-ball burst, the other closed, spurred with spurs as sharp as broken glass and dimmed with blood, the cockerel gaped, beak wide open, as though it gasped for breath.

She shouted for the other bird. "Put them down and see if they can stand!" She watched the game old fellow fall forward on its hard breast then raise itself and shake itself, blood dripping from its fearful wounds. Its short gills were swollen. Its feathers torn and hacked. It staggered a step then stepped out gamely, strutting, looking for the enemy out of bright, black eyes, leaving a trail of blood on the white floor.

"Bâsah! Bâsah!"

The servants shouted. One threw a red flower from behind her ear. They laughed when the stout old fellow made a gallant peck at it and falling sideways lay there, the bloody spurs hampering its efforts to rise.

"One—two—three——"

The booming of the sweet, deep voice penetrated Billy's drugged mind. He stopped laughing, rose, swayed and sat down again. Molly closed her eyes. She knew who the horned beast was. Ah, shame. Ah dreadful, dreadful shame! Clothed in a loin cloth, his shrunken old torso bare, his shrunken old legs bare, white hair crowned with the insignia of his disgrace, her Uncle Olly, drunk, capered on all fours round and round the birds.

OLD PAN.

He looked like a satyr mask come to life, something grotesque from the jungle, an old Pan dancing round and round to a hunchback's strumming.

A vile and brutal scene.

Billy, brain numbed, power of speech gone, watched out of eyes which took in nothing. Harimau, shameless, looked at him and spoke to her servants. She would teach white women and the white races to scorn her. The Tuan Moll-ee would never cease to regret the afternoon she turned her haughty head away as Harimau, the most sought after woman in Asia, passed. The numbing effect of the drugged wine would wear off. It was already losing its power. When the boy regained his speech and the use

of his limbs she would take him up the moon stairs to her chamber. The sycophants, her servants, laughed. Hicks capered round and round the wounded birds to the Jester's thrumming.

Molly heard. To prevent herself from running to her brother she clung to the tree. Pressed her face against it. Prayed. That the fight should come to a quick end, the place be cleared of servants and a weapon given her. Something. Anything with which to terrorise the woman into letting Billy go.

She clung to the tree, praying, whilst Ombak, swept past the harbour by the tide, brought The Sea Slug round and fought his way back, inch by inch, and Hicks, on hands and knees, baited the old bird.

THE COCK-FIGHT.[1]

To get its blood up, to rouse it, he pulled a feather in the gashed wing. Flipped the torn cheek. The little crowd laughed to see such sport when the bird flew straight into the old face and tore it with its beak. Hicks ran backwards on all fours, bleating like a goat. Billy tried to shout and the Hunchback nodded when he saw the sweat running down the boy's ashen face.

"Sew the bird's eyelid to its cheek." Harimau pointed to the young cock. "It has stopped fighting because it's blind. Quickly now, and you, Ular, set another 'watch' timed for a three minute round." She watched the lad with a piece of cocoanut. "Set it floating when I clap my

[1] Most unfortunately witnessed by the writer.

hands twice. Come now, how much longer is the stitching to take?" She frowned as the servants crowded round to watch the bird's eyelid stitched down to its cheek. "Get back there!" She shouted. "All of you! One might think this the first cock-fight witnessed in The House of The New-Moon." She clapped her hands sharply. "Put the birds on the ground, no, fool, not in the ring, on the floor and make a ring round them." She clapped her hands twice and waited for the 'watch' to be set afloat.

A curve of cocoanut, the water flowing through the hole pierced in the centre of the curve, it would sink, water-logged, in three minutes and so end the fight.

The 'watch' floated. The Juâra knelt, the bloodstained birds in their hands. Bets rang from side to side. Molly hid her eyes and Billy sat staring.

Harimau clapped her hands.

The birds flew straight at each other, using their beaks. They met breast to breast. The young cock tried to slip under the other's guard. With a superb effort the old bird rose and dropped, slashing with its spurs. The young one fell sideways, got up somehow to its feet and rushed, head out, trying for an opening, pushing forward, pushing with its head. To get under the old one's guard, under the impeding wing. To get its head through and its steel-strong beak into the back of the other's head, through the vulnerable spot near the spine. The old cock ran back, its wing feathers tearing the stitch which held the young one's lower eyelid open. Completely blinded the young one fought. It stabbed with its beak. To shouts of laughter it stabbed thin air and stood, quite still, bewildered. The old

one, up to every trick, rushed it. Under the wing guard shot the old head on the lanky sinewy neck. It stabbed. Then, twisting its bleak head, drove its beak in. Once. The spectators shouted. The 'watch' sank. The young bird fell dead, a mass of blood and feathers.

"Bâsah! Bâsah! Bâsah!"

Billy tried to speak. The Old Goat capered round and round. The Old Bird lifted its ghastly head, staggered up to the fallen enemy and crowed.

THE RESCUE.

"Let me go first, Tuan. Should there be spies about they will mistake me in the dark for a servant running to the scene of merriment and shouting." Ombak pushed open the iron gate, followed by Day. "Follow me without sound, Tuan, without word. The House stands in a belt of trees which taper to a fine point. Two single trees, one at either side, mark the end of this path. Hide behind the tree to the west, Excellency, and wait for my return." He looked at the sky. "The stars mark an hour before the dawn. There is much to be done in little time."

Day made no sound as he ran up the path. Ombak made none as he came back running. Now was their time. The woman had gone up to her chamber under the roof. There was no one about. The servants cluttered the back of the House where they squabbled over the betting. There was a light at the top of the moon stairs. A sound of laughter. The light came from the woman's room. The laughter was hers. The Serang put his hand on Day's arm. "The

Tuan Moll-ee, without weapon, stands at the foot of the stairs looking up." He led Day further up the belt of trees. "She is defenceless, Tuan, but do not startle her. Let her be. Let her develop the hour in which we come to her assistance."

"The risk, Ombak!"

"Life is all risk, Excellency. Death and my fidelity to the Lady Kris and her friends are the only certainty."

They watched Molly. A shadow, she climbed the stairs, stopped and looked back. Once, at the sound of her Uncle Olly's deep laughter, she stopped and looked up. "Now, Tuan, is the moment. The woman's servants entertain their friends from near by. They will come later to clear away the wines and foods, the sherbet and divers orthodox and unorthodox drinks lying all about." The Serang agreed to let Day go up the stairs alone. One shout would bring him up to the harlot's room. He spat. Nor would he be weaponless like the trusting white folk. No, indeed. For especial occasions and on dangerous errands the Malay was prone to keep a 'kris' snugged about his person.

Day waited at the foot of the stairs. Molly went up. The lilt of the sobbing song, the strings' broken laughter, drifted down the stairs to her, drifted out into the night. Cross-legged behind a gaudy curtain near the door the Hunchback watched her. His wound throbbed. His heart ached. He peered round the curtain at Harimau, the woman he loved. Without her jacket, without her cap, her hennaed hair blazing, a scarlet scarf about her breast, she sat on a divan with Billy beside her. He laughed idiotically and pulled at the end of the scarlet scarf as Molly got to

the door. She pressed back against the curtain and bent to free her skirt caught on a brass table. The gaudy room was full of tables cluttered with things. Ivory and jade. Artificial flowers. Bibelots. Junk. A dagger in its jewelled sheath shone on the table which held her skirt. The sheath fell with a clatter onto the table. The harlot's bracelets clashed as she sprang and caught Molly's uplifted arm whilst Hicks, wakened from a drunken stupor, crawled on hands and knees from behind the screen where he had slumbered.

THE FIGHT.

The women fought.

One for Billy who sat sobbing on the divan. The other for her life. Molly gripped the harlot's other wrist and ran her back against the wall. Choking with rage they fought in silence. Molly wrenched her right hand free and struck. Harimau laughed, a red stain showing where the dagger had scratched her shoulder. Bred of the gutter, in which she had learned many things, she caught Molly by the chin. To force her head back, to break her neck. Molly bent her knees suddenly, sprang clear and sprang again. Straight at the Malay whilst Kechil laughed behind the gaudy curtain.

Allah, what a night!

The finest cock-fight ever witnessed in the court and here two women fighting to the death over a stripling. Had he only had someone handy to take his bets he would have put his last sarong on the white girl with blue eyes blazing in her death-white face.

Watch that!

The harlot, fallen sideways when the Tuan Moll-ee so skilfully bent her knees, had leapt to her feet and was running to the door. He knew why. Indeed he did. Let her get the white girl onto the top step and down the whole flight would pitch the Tuan Moll-ee. And he was not so sure about his last cent on the white girl. She was lithe and strongly built but her mind would be infinitely slower than the Malay's. And mind was three-quarters of every battle. As anyone who had had the luck to watch bull and cock fighting could tell you. Watch the white girl rush straight into the trap set for her. As the white races, endowed with as much craft and subtlety as sheep, usually did rush into and at things, places and problems. It was a strange fight fought in a grim silence. They made no sound, they said no word. The woman's eyes were slits of cunning, the white girl's fine teeth showed between her lips. Caution forgotten, he stepped from behind the curtain, the stringed instrument held about his neck by a jewelled chain, a humped, fantastic blot in the strong light.

Harimau came running backwards, out onto the steps, Molly close behind her. Day, on the stairs, stopped and held his breath. He knew every trick of Malayan wrestling, knew that the woman, with Molly so close, would step swiftly to one side, kneel, catch Molly by the knees and pitch her down the flight to certain death. He started to run up and stopped.

The Hunchback held Harimau by the knees. In an effort to save the two young whites, one from death and

the other from worse than death, he put his strong arms round the woman's knees and pulled her to one side. She wrenched herself free, caught the little man by the collar to his distorted, jewelled jacket and pitched him down the white-marble stairs. Dreadful! Shameful! His twisted back banged against the balustrade, his face against the steps. There was the crack of a broken bone and the thud, thud, thud of his bent body as he bounced like a white and jewelled ball from the top to the bottom.

THE WOMEN.

They fought down the steps. They fought each step. Molly, holding back, gripping the balustrade. The Malay trying to pull her down, to force her one step lower so that she could throw her down the full flight in the wake of the Hunchback who had bounced like a white and jewelled ball from the top to the bottom.

Afraid of distracting Molly, Day backed slowly down the stairs to where Kechil lay. Bruised, battered, three ribs broken, the Hunchback got to his feet, laughed up at Day, finger to lips and shuffled off across the court to the laden tables. The sweat of agony dripped from the beautiful face to the misshapen, torn, stained coat. A twisted arm swung like a pendulum against the broken ribs until he caught it and tucked it into the front of his jewelled jacket. He sifted sherbet into a crystal glass, his eyes on the two women as they fought each step. Molly's dress, ripped from the neck, showed her white shoulders, the Malay was bare to the waist. He laughed, nodded his handsome head and searched in his sarong.

Ombak ran out of the shadows and caught Day by the arm as Molly slipped and the harlot, freed, ran for the open court. "Not a word, Tuan," he whispered. "The woman is a snake for swiftness. One moment of distraction and the Tuan Moll-ee is dead." They waited in the shadows. The women faced each other across the red patch where the birds had fought then Molly screamed at the sight of Billy swaying on the topmost step of all.

BILLY.

There was a band of white-hot iron round his head and something as hot and searing behind his eyes. He could not see clearly and he seemed to be walking on air. Like a balloon. Ha-ha! A balloon with legs. How had he got to the top of the very steep flight of stairs? and why were people staring up at him from the foot and from the very white court? He remembered Harimau, The Tiger, sitting in the court when he arrived at the place and surely he had arrived by water from—from where? blessed if he knew. And where was the woman? and what had happened? and why did people stand so very still and all in a mist looking up at him?

He must go down. He couldn't. Not he. The stairs were too steep. Should he ask the people to come up and help him down? People were very kind. Or should he throw himself down? He must get down because he must get back to where—where to? he couldn't remember. And who was in the room behind him? He would never get back now. He couldn't walk down those steep steps and someone barred the way behind, ha! ha!

He began to laugh. A silly sound which had to do with the iron band round his head and the white-hot something behind his eyes. He couldn't stop laughing. And he should because if he was ever to get to the boat which would take him to wherever he wanted to go, wherever that was—ha! ha!—he must step on it whilst Harimau was—wherever she might be—ha! ha!—yes, wherever that was. How funny it all seemed. He couldn't see with his eyes very well but he could see quite clearly all the same. He had thought himself in love with the woman and now—ha! ha!—she seemed all mixed up with pain and blood—ha! ha!—yes, and feathers—ha! ha! ha!—and someone laughing behind him. A jolly sound like a jolly deep bell —ha! ha!—listen—ding-dong—listen—ding-dong. He must find out who laughed like a jolly old bell, ding-dong, ding-dong. He must look round, over his shoulder, even if he did want to throw himself down the stairs.

Ha-ha! ha-ha-ha!

Of all the funny sights! Pan in shorts. An ancient Pan or a very old goat. Ha! ha! did you ever! and with golden horns. And look at that. The old goat with white hair and gilded horns had turned suddenly into Old Hiccoughs. No, which was it? An old Pan capering on its hind legs or good old Hiccoughs fox-trotting in next to nothing? That voice like a bell, a jolly old bell. Ding-dong, ding-dong. The merry old goat held out a hand or was it a hoof to help him down, ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong.

Eyes blazing in delirium, face drained death-white by the drug, Billy linked his arm in Hickory Hick's and swayed upon the step.

"Not a sound, not a breath, old son, for your life. D'you get that? There's 'tiger' about, ha! ha!"

"You're exceedingly drunk, young feller-me-lad!" Hicks chuckled in the whitey-grey of the coming dawn. "We're both very drunk, indeed!"

"Ha! ha!" Billy laughed. "Ha! ha! ha!" and crumpled up on the steps up which Ombak came running.

Shouting with laughter Harimau pointed to where Billy lay sobbing on the steps. She twisted sideways when Molly flung the dagger, in an effort to kill, to revenge the boy laughing and sobbing on the steps. The Malay pulled the dagger out, looked down at the light wound and nodded. She had the white girl now. Patience won most battles and the Tuan Moll-ee had lost her fight when she had allowed her self-control to snap. She stepped back, laughing, jeering, as the Hunchback came strutting across the court.

THE GREAT LONELINESS.

His sarong and misshapen jacket were stained with blood. Also his jewelled shoes. His physical agony was almost too much to bear but, like the game old Fighting-Cock, he strutted as he walked, pointing his toes, swinging his humped shoulders, a glass of sickly, fizzing sherbet in his hand.

"To help you win, O Dauntless One!" he said and lifted the glass cool and sweet in the hideous scene. "Leave me the dregs and I will drink them to show you that I am indeed less than the dust under your lovely feet." He lifted the glass to his mouth and smiled, his lips white

with the sickly froth, but he did not drink. "That was to show you, Beautiful One, that your Jester is your most humble servant. The dust beneath your feet. Content with the other side of your cup." He twisted the crystal and held it up, watched her drink and reaching up with his long arm snatched the goblet from the harlot's hand as she fell dead.

He laughed and put the crystal down and taking off his stained and jewelled coat laid it across her bare breast. In his silken shirt he looked down at her and motioned the others back. "Take the brother and sister to the boat, Tuan, swiftly," he said to Day and thrummed lightly upon the stringed instrument round his neck. "The lad will be well by the setting of the sun. Nor will he ever forget. 'Twas ever thus 'twixt twins, 'twixt those born of the same hour. Nay, nay, leave the Tuan Ol' Ik. He has our heart's love. He will be well cared for nor will bull-fighting cease just because Harimau, The Tiger, reigns no more in The Village of The Bulls." He beckoned Ombak. "Carry the Tuan Bill-ee on your strong back to the boat and you, Tuan, O Holy One, carry the sister who lies fainting in your arms." He laughed and snapped his fingers. "And then search for two nuts and add them to your store in The Basket of Souls." He watched them go. He watched the Old Goat, like a satyr in merry mood, caper lightly away through the belt of trees towards The Harlot's Gate, the gilt horns flashing in the light of the distant dawn.

Then, when all was still, and nothing stirred because of the gentle silence before the dawn, he knelt down beside

the woman he loved, arranged her hair, ran his fingers over her long lashes and touched her scarlet mouth. "You look as though you slept, Most Beautiful," he said and sat down at her feet to await the sun. "Never, never more do we meet, my Sweet, because for you there is no hereafter. Had there been I would have beseeched Allah, The Most Bountiful, to have placed me near you in the Beyond, were it only as a watch-dog in the dust at your gate."

A stable coolie passing through the belt of trees peered from behind a tree-trunk. "Better to be a childless hunchback strumming at the feet of a sleeping harlot than a straight man carrying water to earn enough to feed his many children," he said and passed on. Katok limped from the back of the house, listened to the sobbing melody and limped back. "She sleeps to the Twisted One's thrumming and the white boy has slipped from between her ruthless fingers." She threw coin on the table and sat down. "Who knows if his drunkenness was not a shamming? can the East ever hope to plumb the guile of the Western mind?" and snapping her deft fingers took to gambling to pass an idle hour.

An elephant trumpeted from the stables. A fan of primrose edged with divers colours spread across the east. The stars went out and a dawn-moth came fluttering. It lighted on the edge of the crystal cup, sipped and died.

Kechil went on thrumming.

The wind caught the melody in minor key and the sobbing, sobbing, sobbing. A woman lay dead and for women there was no hereafter. The wind joined the Jester's sobbing to the twittering of birds and the first bee's humming.

Tears dripped down the Hunchback's wounded face and fell upon his hands. He wept for the loneliness of his eternity to come and stayed his fingers upon the strings in which laughter lay still hidden. He gathered up the brilliant butterfly and dropped it lightly upon the harlot's wound where it gleamed like an emerald spattered with gold. He looked at the sky, a canopy of many colours caught at one corner with the last star, and raised the crystal cup to his last dawn.

Drinking the poisoned dregs Kechil, The Jester, the little, twisted man, put the goblet down and touching the feet of the woman he loved, laughed and died, nor, so small his stature, did he fall forward as he passed into the loneliness of his eternity.

Katok came limping, to find him, so great of heart, sitting there, the sobbing melody forever ended, the laughing refrain caught as a smile on the beautiful, peaceful face.

THE SCAPEGOAT.

"——and I don't see why I should!" Grannie Dindings smoothed the lap of her evening gown, a grey-satin antiquity trimmed with superb lace of the heirloom variety and dabbed about with brooches. "I know, my dear, I know." She looked at Christine, laughing and lazy in a long-chair. "David Day hinted at it last week, that dreadful morning when I arrived to find Billy in a raging fever and Molly with a streak of white in her hair from anxiety or something like that." She tapped a crackling pocket in the front of her best gown. "Here I have another of David's screeds in his copperplate script and posted just be-

fore he left for the Borneo bush. Urging me, *me,* to offer up my state of single blessedness, or some such clerical fudge, on the altar of that old reprobate's redemption." She glowered at Strong. "I dare say you did look upon my arrival here that dreadful, dreadful morning as a perfect godsend. If I hadn't got in on the noon tide you would have been obliged to have left on the next, with those children and David Day. There are still a few shreds of decency left to the East, thank heavens." She smoothed her thick, grey hair. "I have more than a suspicion that Billy's fever and the white in Molly's hair and Hickory Hick's—the name almost chokes me—outrageous bout of drunkenness were just three separate parts of a disgraceful orgy though I can't say I see the connection between the old wastrel emulating Pan or some such goat on the mainland and the children raving with delirium over here." She shook her finger at Strong. "You know. So does my godchild, Christine. So does David Day. You are all in it, all in league and I am hurt to the quick at being left out in the cold." Christine shook her head when Strong endeavoured to break in on the nonstop verbal flow. "Then on the top of Billy's fever, Molly's white hair and the Pan exhibition comes the news of the harlot's death over there, poisoned by her hunchback jester. And that New-Moon House—which sounds exactly like a public house on the London-Portsmouth road—is to be bought by the authorities, bull-ring, village and bungalow and turned into a health institution for the native——"

"Which will throw Uncle Olly into the street, Grannie."

"Into the street!" Grannie, heart of gold, glared. "Into

the street, indeed! What do you think the street would be to him after a bull-ring? a leg-up, my dear, a leg-up from the gutter." She repinned a brooch to hide her eyes. "A white man and a gentleman as referee to a loose woman's bull-fights. Paid for the job, too. Then, when drunk, *drunk*, prancing about the creature's marble courts dressed up like a carnival clown in shorts and gilded horns, *horns!*"

Christine looked at Strong when a tear splashed into the middle of a gold locket set with pearls and turquoise.

"If this isn't a case for The Nut Basket I don't quite know what is but David Day rushes off for months, perhaps a year, perhaps more, to worry over the wild men of Borneo or some such hairy, heathen horde and has the presumption—the—the—words absolutely fail me to describe his unbounded nerve, to ask me to marry the old reprobate. *Marry* him!" She rapped the letter with a firm hand as she played to save her 'face.' "Instead of, as I suggested, my taking him as a partly paying guest when I retire from the committee of The Foundling Home next month." The old actress slapped open the letter, pulled it as though it had shrunk in the wash and shook it she was inwardly so glad. "Just listen to this." She fixed tortoise-shell specs on a slightly hooked nose and began to read, snorts as punctuation.

'——you would have no hold over him as a paying-guest, my dear friend. He would come. He would go. Those little dens in the ports where intoxicants are sold for a quarter the hotel price would call. He would drift

down one night. And another. And the next and one night would never come back again.

'His addiction to potent liquor is nothing but a recurrent disease, like influenza or hay-fever and far less to be deplored than the disease of a scandal-loving tongue or, still worse, a heart devoid of the milk of human kindness which is really nothing but that charity which thrives upon sacrifice.

'As your husband, my dear friend, or shall I say, as the partner of the end of your most noble life, he would be anchored safely in the harbour of your kind and generous heart, instead of perhaps meeting his death on the floor of some den in the lower reaches of a Far Eastern port.

'I pray you think it over. I do pray, morning, noon and night that He who worried so much over just one lost sheep will see this one is safe in some neighbouring fold at the ending of the day——'

Grannie paused, whilst fidgetting her specs, to remark that she thought, taking the Pan exhibition into consideration, the clerical simile barely in the best of taste whilst Strong, to draw attention to the tears coursing down the bonny old cheeks, took Christine's hand in his.

'——not that my prayers are the strongest argument in the dear old fellow's favour. There is a stronger, and you know, my dear friend, to what I am alluding——'

Flushing sweetly pink, Grannie abruptly folded the letter. "And that's all!" she snapped. "And upon my word enough for one envelope."

Christine got up and sat on the arm of Grannie's chair. "It's not all," she said and put her arm round the old shoulders.

"How do you mean, not all, my dear?"

Christine whispered in Grannie's ear whilst Grannie fidgetted the glasses which served as a dam to the tears behind. "Wasn't he?" Grannie nodded. "And you were, weren't you?" Grannie nodded. "Then won't you think it over, Grannie, darling?"

Grannie Dindings got up, shook out her full skirts, removed the specs from her dominant nose, pushed Christine away and walked up stairs.

"Grannie!"

Grannie stopped on the landing and looked down.

"Do you remember what the fortune-teller saw in your hand at that Bazaar? A wedding and a crown."

"Crown! *crown!* that, my dear, the charlatan saw in a mist. Rubbish! nothing but rubbish!" Grannie recommenced her climbing then stopped and looked over the banisters. "And as I said just now, the street is a good leg-up from the gutter."

OVER THE PRECIPICE.

They watched her go then turned to where Ria stood, all excitement, her many bracelets clashing. Ombak had sent word that a school of Fire Fish had pursued a shoal of fishing into the North Cove. The water was covered with blue-green and silver fire. Above the water were fiery darts and circles as the fish played hide-and-seek. There were fire splashes on the sands and up on the rocks where the fish had leapt.

"The Serang begs you to come quickly, Mistress, as it is once in many moons the Fire Fish come to the east coast. You will come at once, Mistress, then I will fetch a wrap as mist crowns the Point." She opened the door to Christine's room and left it open. Opened the door to her bedroom and left it open so that Strong thought a battered brass knob to a battered iron bedstead was somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the luxurious house. Wondering when, if ever, he would be invited into the study where the derelict seaman's chest stood across one corner, he took the shawl from Ria when Christine dismissed her for the night, wrapped it about her and walked with her through the dusk whilst she explained Grannie's one-time engagement to the dissolute old Pan.

"——and Uncle Olly took to roaming the ports and sowing the seed of a none too temperate reputation."

Strong laughed. "Sowing the seed? I expect the sprouting of the seed already sown wrecked that engagement, Lady Kris," he said and pulling her hand through his arm whilst talking of obstreperous Grannie, took her to the North Cove by the west instead of the east path. So that they should not pass the little mound under the mango tree. He hated the small grave. He hated the boy statues about The Island. There was an unlikable morbidness in the whole twin theory, however wisely it was expounded. The disaster on the mainland a week back had seemed perfectly comprehensible and justifiable to the Lady Kris. She would have fought in just the same way for her twin brother, she had said. Personally, the story of the fight had almost sickened him. Such absorbing love

between brother and sister seemed so far removed from the love he felt for Christine. A protecting, all shielding kind of affection into which the senses, or the emotions, rather, did not seem to enter at all. He loved the friendliness of her hand upon his arm just as he rejoiced in her somewhat arrogant assumption that all men had been born to wait upon her hand and foot. He asked nothing better than to wait upon her hand and foot, to the best of his ability, to the end of his life. Her enthusiasm was catching. There had been no difficulty over the site for the laboratory. Within the last week the news of the proposed Institution had got into the papers and been flashed throughout the world. The Hope Laboratory. The hope of the sick and the suffering. Scientists were writing ecstatic leaders. Tenders were pouring in. Coolie lines had been laid out and, best of all, Grannie Dindings had consented to chaperone The Island until the quarters for the scientific visitors had been roughed up in the cove.

"——still, fifty years don't make an impassable moat between now and then, do they? She'll marry him of course and the wedding will be from here——"

"By launch, hydroplane, junk and sampan."

"With Grant senior as best man."

"And a wreath of roses in Grannie's silvery bonnet instead of the misty crown the fortune-teller saw as large as life on her marriage line and—oh, look!"

They stopped under the trees at the top of the steep path which led down to the fiery cove.

"Phosphorus, of course, and you've never seen it before, Lady Kris?"

"No, never."

"That makes it all the more wonderful. I mean wonderful to be with you when you see something beautiful for the first time."

Because the path was very steep and the edge of the cliff just where they stood had begun to crumble, because he loved her with a gentle and all-protecting love, Strong wrapped the shawl a little closer about Christine and kept her safe in the shelter of his arm to watch the flashing waters.

A stream of silver, ragged at the edge and stretching as far as eye could see, came in, in rippling waves, to spread fanwise across the small bay. Streaks of silver broke the silver fan as the fish, close pressed, leapt in darts and circles and flashing figures of eight into the dusky, scented air. Servants packed the lower ledges. Women, babes in arms, held youngsters firmly by the hand. When elder children climbed down to the rescue of those fish which, leaping too high, found themselves high and dry above water level, men held firmly to the child's garment. Chinese trouser, Malay sarong. Immaterial which. A great game it was, too, flinging the fiery fish back into the ebbing tide. Hands glowed with phosphorus, clothes, too, and shoes. Pity the fish made such bad eating otherwise the night might have recorded divers fishy and spicy culinary odours.

Christine, Strong's arms about her, stood in the shadows of the trees which came down to the edge of the cliff. Beneath them, half way between them and high-tide level, jutted the broad ledge or plateau on which the Hope Laboratory would be built.

"There are signs of a beginning." Christine leaned far over, pointing. "Do you see? Barbed wire. I suppose there will be quite a lot of blasting to scare my beautiful birds from the Point." She screamed as Fate crumbled the cliff under her feet, caught at a bush which came up in her hand and slipped over the edge.

"Dig your toes in." Strong, on his chest, holding her by one wrist, reached down and caught her by the elbow. "You must get a purchase or your arm breaks. That's right. Now. When I hold you very tightly by the elbow reach up and grip my other hand. When I tell you to, try and swing yourself nearer into the cliff so that I can get my arm under your shoulders. Now. Splendid." Her cry had been lost in the childrens' shouting. All eyes were on the sparkling waters. The shadows wrapped them completely about in a dusky mantle when she came up over the ledge into her brother's arms.

"I did not know you were so dear to me."

"So dear to you?"

"I love you so."

He put his arm about her and went away with her through the trees.

"I think this is an answer to my prayers."

"Your prayers?"

"I have prayed night and morning, I have prayed all through the day that something might happen to keep me near you forever."

Very slowly they went back to the house, walking as though they made part of a sorrowful procession. There was nothing joyful about them. Neither in their hearts nor in their eyes. And from Christine the first note of the

distress which had been between them from the beginning. She stopped on the threshold of the house in which they had been born and pushed the hair from her forehead as though she would lift some burden pressing there, pressing upon her. She opened the door of the room in which the seaman's chest stood across one corner, opened the further door and stood on the threshold with her brother.

"I have never thought of love—like this—in just this way," she said, and gently because she was so kind. "You see I am one of twins and I have always lived for the memory of my brother. I have always—always——"

"Always?"

"I—I have always hoped he would come back to me. From the dead, I mean. I have never *really* believed him dead. Of course I know he is but I have always hoped to see him one day in the spirit and speak to him." She slipped her hand in Strong's and rested her head a little wearily against his shoulder. "Everything in this room has to do with my brother. We were born on that bed and, because he was the first-born, he was put into that cradle." She smiled. "I see no reason why you should not come in and look at the cradle, my greatest treasure. This is a very holy room. Both rooms were really one, my Mother's bedroom. My parents' bedroom I should have said. My Father died here and so did my Mother. She was a wonderful woman and her trust in God was absolutely unshakable." She looked at him. "She was just a little stern. Like you only more so. And strong like you. Morally, I mean." They entered the room and looked down at the cradle with its old muslin curtains and faded, rotting blue

ribbon. "Uncle David told me the little there was to tell about my brother. Uncle David's a doctor, you know and was with Mother at the time——"

"And so was my father."

"Your father? oh, of course." She clasped her hands upon his arm. "Of course. Do you know I never, never remember that Bramly Lowth adopted you. Nor does anyone. Uncle David was saying only the other day that you seem just a part of The Island. Of ourselves. I mean Uncle David and the Grants, Grannie Dindings, Uncle Olly and myself."

"Mayn't I be really one of you?" Standing by the cradle in the tragic room he took her hands. "Will you marry me? Do you love me enough to marry me, Lady Kris?" He watched doubt, fear and love for him flash and die out in her frightened eyes. He, too, doubted and feared. Not because of his love for her but of the kind of love he had for her. He loved her. He wanted to be near her always. To wait on her and surround her with everything a heart could desire. To be near her at all hours. To talk with her and laugh. Travel. Have meals with her. But marriage? Marriage with its lasting ties, close companionship and sacred intimacy was something which seemed to fit his thought of her as an ill-fitting glove might her hand. He had asked her to marry him because, loving her and longing to be with her always, it seemed the only way but, and why he could not have told you, he did not really want to marry her nor even kiss her as a man kisses the one woman chosen out of all the world to be his wife.

There seemed a ghostly barrier between them. It had been there from the very beginning. From the first time he had seen her. A feeling of uncertainty or was it almost of proscription? It seemed, as he stood there in the strange room, as though someone quite close to him whispered without words: 'Thou shalt not!' He shivered suddenly. Yes, that was it. It was for all the world as though the ten commandments stood as a solid wall between them.

THOU SHALT NOT.

And Christine?

"Marriage?" she whispered. "Marry you? I don't know. I mean I can't." She moved her hands as though she would push something from her, out of her path. "I feel as though, I don't quite know how to explain it, as though loving my brother as I have always loved him, that I ought not to marry." She went to the other room and sat down upon the long-chair on which Bramly Lowth had sat the night he had driven the shameful bargain. "I can't explain. Come and sit here whilst I try to." Troubled, she put her hand in Strong's. "I can never expect you to understand anything so—so, I think the word is psychic." She clasped her hands. "It is just as though someone, perhaps Mother, perhaps my twin brother, were standing beside me saying: 'Thou shalt not! Thou must not!' and that of course is just an echo of the ten commandments."

"But you love me."

She looked up and nodded but more as if she were trying to solve some abstract problem than this one so

intimately concerning her. "I want you to be with me, always. To be near me. I cannot imagine life without you although I have only known you for so short a time." She looked about the room. "Yet I feel as though I had known you all my life." She drew her hand away. "I should like to travel with you. I can think of nothing more delightful than having breakfast with you after the morning ride. There would be so much to discuss and plan if we were together always, though that is more like friendship than—than love, I think." She covered her face with her hands. "But marriage—marriage——"

.

Distant laughter came to them on the night wind. The sound of the sea, too. A horn-beetle knocked its wings against the window-frame as it crawled up and down the window-netting patiently trying to find a way to where the light shone. It sounded like someone knocking for admittance. As though love, outside, watching the brother and sister sitting there, distressed, troubled, the sad victims of the sale, tried to attract their attention.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Would they not look up? Right up. Above the cloud of doubt surrounding them and the sure flood of disaster threatening them? There was nothing to tell them who they were. No one. But would they not look up to where renunciation, sacrifice shone, as the beacon flared from The Point, a warning in the storm. Their love was so pure but they were not to know it was just that purity which stood as a ghostly barrier between them and disaster. There was so little to overcome. To keep them safe. Just

the disastrous longing, born of the bond between them, to be with each other always. Could they only fight that longing, overcome it, then the way would be clear. A little lonely, perhaps, unfinished, as a piece of work begun and put away, the outline of the pattern, a corner of it, stitched in to show how beautiful the completed work would have been.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Would they not look up? Light came from above. If they, godfearing, would raise their heads, if they, children of a godfearing man and woman, would look up and ask for light they would so clearly see that their doubts and fears, unhappiness and distress were just the beacon lights warning them of danger.

The light did touch them. It disturbed them as they sat in the sorrowful room. Christine clasped and unclasped her hands in her lap. "Love, real love is gladness," she said. "I love you but my love for you does not send me running with you to give thanks in the little church down near the sea." She laid her cheek against his arm. "I don't understand. I thought love meant thanksgiving. I thought —I have often wondered why those just engaged never go to church, by themselves, or hand in hand, perhaps over the hills, singing, or quite silent, to give thanks to the Lord." She looked up at Strong. "I think," she continued gravely, so still in her silver-white gown, "that I should have run over the grass, singing, to give thanks had our love been—been—oh, I don't know. I don't seem to be able to explain." Wringing her hands she got up and crossed to the seaman's chest, so slender a girl in her ex-

quisite gown. Silver and white it almost touched the ground, standing out in a bell from her silver feet, swinging when she moved. Her arms were bare, her hair in a dusky knob in the nape of her neck. She caught the silver shoulder-strap as it slipped, pulled it up again, heart full of doubt and foreboding, and lifted the lid, one hand holding the shoulder-strap.

She closed the lid softly and turned to look at her brother. "Do you think my brother is trying to stop me from marrying you?" She whispered, looking about, and shivered at the tapping on the window. "This Island is a shrine to his memory. The boy statues. All this. Come and look once more." She crossed to the window and looked out. "All that Mother did for her son and I for my brother." She looked across the room. "The night we were born Bramly Lowth sat in the old living-room behind that table over there, with the check cloth on it. Uncle David described the room to me. There was an eight-hour candle in that old iron candlestick. That desk was in the living-room, too. I told you this mosaic brooch was Mother's and in the chest I have an old shawl which Uncle David says Mother wore that night."

She lifted the lid again and took out the sorry shawl Elinor Still had worn the night of her childrens' birth, the two there, in the same room, this tragic night twenty years later. She pressed her cheek to it and laid it back, shutting the lid upon it then pulled the silver cross on the worn, gold chain up from her breast. "Mother was very poor then. This and the mosaic brooch and her wedding ring were the only precious things she had. I always talk

of Mother because the only thing I can remember about my Father is his sternness and his death." She crossed to the battered old desk at which Bramly Lowth had written out the bond. "And I often wonder if this penholder had anything to do with my brother." She opened a drawer. "I found it after Mother's death, in this cardboard box with 'This pen is never to be used again' written on the lid."

Strong turned the holder over. A cheap thing, the nib corroded with the ink with which Elinor had signed away her first-born, had sold her motherhood. The laughter of a child going home came to them on the night wind. The laughing voice of the mother. Strong watched his twin sister put the pen back into the box on which had been written:

'This pen is never to be used again.'

Her hands were so gentle. The silver strap slipped from her shoulder. It hung in a loop over her arm. The bodice, cut in a deep V, slipped but, because Fate held her hand, she pulled the strap up again.

She shut the pen away and stood with her hands on the desk at which had been written the bond which had taken her brother from her.

He came and stood beside her. The beetle flew away home. The Fire Fish had gone and the laughing child slept safely in its mother's arms.

"I don't know what to say."

"Can you let me go?"

"Never! no, never!" Christine held him by the arm.

"As this is so, dear, and as I can't live without you, there is only one way for us to take." He bent and kissed her hands. "Life is before us, dear, and I think dawn is very near."

He went up to his room and stood by his window, wondering why he was so little glad whilst Christine went out to the mock grave under the mango tree.

THE HIGH GROUND.

SO GAY.

And so it came about that some months later two weddings were added to the City of Singapore's marriage records.

Grannie Dindings was given into the care of Hickory Hicks, though perhaps it would be more correct written the other way about. A little wreath of roses, as softly coloured as her eyes were softly shining, adorned a festive grey-silk bonnet. She wore a silvery grey taffeta dress, or gown, of voluminous skirt and separate bodice of many buttons. In the middle of an old-lace jabot shone the golden locket set with pearls, an ancient shrine in which for fifty years she had cherished the frightful and whiskered portrait of the man she loved.

For a week guests had crammed The Island to capacity. On the auspicious day, the wind set fair, the sea most kind, craft of every description plied from early dawn 'twixt Singapore and Hope Island. There was laughter. There was noise in abundance. Cheery sirens hooted for neither apparent nor adequate reason. The Sampan Fishing Fleet, stowing its nets, flashed over the waters like animated brown water-flies. The harbour was decorated. Likewise every child. Triumphal arches spanned the steep

paths up. Ponies clattered and slithered to the top with the stouter and more courageous of the guests, singing coolies carried the fainthearted or those who feared to crush their glad raiment.

The Chinese Village surpassed itself.

Fireworks whizzed and rockets cracked. Divers devices such as flower garlands, masks, the Chinese Characters of Good Luck, Happiness and Wealth, soared to the blue heavens in company with the birds scared from the Point. A Buddhist temple banged its gongs, conch shells screamed and moaned, the English church did as best it was able with its single bell and a disgruntled Malay ringer.

The Village of The Bulls put the Chinese Village completely in the shade however.

It had crossed from the mainland the day before. In sampans and its entirety. Its aggressive annexation of the best point of vantage on the wedding route almost caused an inter-racial riot. It claimed the Tuan Ol' Ik for its very, very own. The others could have the ancient spouse, the redoubtable Tuan Gra' Din-din if they liked but hands off their white-haired, sporting veteran. They fought the matter verbally, an effort which almost outdid the rockets and the gongs. They flouted the heads of every village, the priests of every denomination and threatened to spill blood. It bordered on the unseemly. When steel did flash it reached its apex and Ria ran for her life for the Lady Kris.

"Bâsah! Bâsah!" yelled The Village of The Bulls at sight of her so sweet and reproving in her lovely gown

and shouted still more violently and swaggered not a little when she gave them best in the disputed territory. Duly admiring the fibre carpet especially woven for The Village's section of the nuptial route she vetoed a pair of spreading buffalo horn as the decorative crown to its own particular triumphal arch. Nor would she permit recuperated Bull Nine with the rosy Cow, transferred by junk, to make part of the procession.

David Day's absence was a matter for universal lamentation.

"My darling Squirrel has disappeared into the Archipelago bush," explained Molly, entrancing in a series of glad new frocks to the handsome young planter who had constituted himself her shadow. "It's the day's one blot. I expect he's been hauled off the map to decide a case of murder or theft or some trifle like that. He's nothing to look at is my darling Squirrel but he's just everything to know and in church you simply wouldn't recognise him. His looks I mean. At the altar his face shines just like a window that has been suddenly lit up." Climbing The Point to show the handsome planter the sights she found Billy on the same glad errand with something as simple looking as her simple looking frock.

"Isn't there a wonderful village over there?" enquired the young thing, one saucer-blue eye glued to the telescope with Billy's help.

"You mean the place they're turning into a sanitorium?" Molly slid an arm round her brother's neck. "A super nursing home to be filled with Christopher Strong's patients once the festive lab's got going."

Blue-eyed simplicity thought that that was what she meant.

Billy touched the white streak in his sister's hair and kissed her. She hugged him, laughing, said she must be going and went her way down after explaining the Beacon to the handsome planter. "There is another blot on the day," she said and stopped midway to explain the second cloud on the day's festivities. "A perfect darling of a boy we know has just died. He came out from home with us, on the same boat, I mean. Had a game lung he thought a winter in Peking might cure."

"You mean the young Duke of Elmswood. The famous Tree family. Yes, rotten luck. One of the wealthiest of the young peers. Great name, umpteen houses, a castle or so, estates, shooting and all the rest and then some. Not counting the family jewels. I suppose a lucky younger brother steps into his cushy shoes."

Molly allowed the planter to take her bag as she explained that the young duke had been a great-grandson, the only son of an only son of an only son. The War had given him the dukedom which now reverted to some n'nth cousin removed in the n'nth degree. "It must be jolly nice to wake up one fine morning to find strawberry leaves wound in your raven locks but I bet Grannie Dinding's just as thrilled over the belated orange blossom I tucked into her jabot." She allowed the planter to carry her bag to Grannie's room where they found her fluttering over the posy.

Molly was sole maid of honour, Grant gave Grannie away. A missionary married the old dears. Rice and roses

strewed the path across The Island. Butterflies, like immense jewels, lighted on the triumphal arches, and garlands slung from tree to tree. Children shouted, men and women waved their hands. Muzzled, blindfolded and slung with garlands Bull Nine and his pink Cow brought up the rear, well out of range of the Lady Kris's eye. The Village of The Bulls banged everything that could give out a crashing sound. A flotilla of motor-boats, flags flying, sirens hooting, escorted The Flying Fish which bore the two old dears to Grannie's white, gift-crammed villa on the hill-side.

SO GRAVE.

There was no noise, no triumphal arches or guests at the second wedding. Hand in hand at dawn, eyes so grave, to the gentle strokes of the single bell they walked across The Island through the ranks of their servants. Grant gave Christine away. Molly, weeping, clung to her mother who wept, though neither could have told you the reason for their tears. Billy, worried he thought because of Day's absence, wished there had been music to break the utter silence of the church.

MISLAID STRAWBERRY LEAVES.

Six months later David Day, sparse luggage at his feet, The Nut Basket filled with gifts from the Archipelago to the Peninsular, leaned on the rail.

"The approach to Singapore is hard to beat," he said

to the youngish man beside him. "You see that square in the hill top? Yes, over there. That is known as The Gap and the betting is you don't go through it three days running without getting drenched to the skin. Singapore's a blue sky, a cloud, a sousing and the sun again. Rather like life don't you think? To my mind lawyers and priests are the real experts on clouds, cloudbursts, floods and silver linings, don't you agree?" The junior partner of the firm of Doit and Well was of the little padre's opinion. "The winds and the rains and the storms are bad enough out here, heaven knows, but nothing when compared to the buffetings, tempests and disasters of life." He shifted the parcels and lifted the lid to the well of The Nut Basket in which lay a handful of nuts.

"I am known as The Squirrel Parson all about here because I go round and round trying to gather souls in out of the storm before the bitter winds blow them off the tree of life to be lost in the mud. I have been quite successful this trip, I must say, although my success has caused me not only to miss the best part of my mail but to unduly prolong my tour. This nut," he turned the nuts over. "It represents a young fellow rescued with tact from a half-caste moneylender and doubtlessly an untimely end. That pinky looking one is a middle-aged, wealthy woman prevented from playing the fool under the urge of years and December Love, one of Nature's most unmixable and indigestible salad dressings. Those others are mere nutlets but which, my dear friend, had I not gathered them in, nipped them in the seed as it were, might, in due season, have grown to a great size and been

eventually covered with that dreadful, rootless fungus we call sin. Rootless? but of course. We have only to say 'Get thee behind me' and sin is *not.*" He shut the lid with a laugh, steady, grey eyes on the islands, between which the boat passed. "I often wonder if the four-footed squirrel, or chipmunk as I believe the Dominion calls it, is given as little time to decide upon its choice of nut as I am given to decide between the right and wrong of a given problem."

He refused a cigarette.

"I don't mean the actual case between two certain people, I mean my own personal decision upon the—er—psychological, no, the spiritual, the moral aspect of the question. Did Smith really do wrong in doing so and so? or did environment, social as well as architectural, help push him down the incline? The same with that native, this lost white. Sin is sin but there are grades to it and many a mitigating circumstance which makes all the difference to the plan of attack and the sentence to be pronounced.

"Then there are the *results* of sin to be thought of. The actual happening may not be in itself a sin, I mean the people concerned may not be conscious of wrong-doing, but the *result of that happening* might evolve into a most grievous sin." He looked up at the sky across which a flock of screaming birds flew north. "And I wonder how many times I have had to hurriedly decide whether to hack the tree down, root and branch, is the right cure or not." He laughed and ran his hand over his thick hair streaked here and there with grey. "Please do forgive me. I ride my hobby with such fervour I make myself

a perfect nuisance to all and sundry." He pointed to the birds. "Birds flying like that are a sign of bad weather from the direction in which they have come. They are flying north, no, northeast, that means something in the offing in the southwest. Dear, dear, there seems to be unending trouble in the East and I do trust I shall be able to help you in your difficult search."

He would do all he could but he was doubtful of success. Very doubtful. Fifty years was a long time and made a great difference, a tremendous alteration in any man's appearance. But especially in a case of this kind where there had never been anything outstanding in the young man's looks. He was very much afraid, also, that few would have troubled to read the advertisements in the daily papers. Custom had somewhat staled the East's interest in missing folk. There were so many lost and strayed east of Suez. Of course a duke was a different matter. His wealth, name and manifold interests made him of a greater importance than common or garden folk.

"Let me get the detail right. I have an old friend who might be able to put you on the scent though his memory is none too—er—reliable at times." Day took out a notebook and jotted down the description of the missing peer. "Philip, Orr, Birch, the Duke of Elmswood through the death of the young duke in Peking. Fair. Blue eyes. Medium height. Clean shaven. Marks of identification nil. Hobbies nil. Mannerisms nil. Winchester. Last seen in Southampton. Last heard of in Bangkok about fifty years ago. Photograph. Old, faded, mildewed and barely evolved from the daguerreotype stratum." He returned the photo-

graph of a young man in Winchester's cricket kit of fifty years back. "I am afraid, Mr. Doit, you will have a very long search but I can promise you one thing. You will find the East most entrancing. With a good deal of snare, delusion and illusion about it but nevertheless most entrancing. Most. And—oh, excuse me—I must wave. I must wave my handkerchief. That red motor-boat. You see it. The girl at the wheel is my godchild, Molly Grant, with her twin brother Billy beside her. No, it is not Billy. Dear, dear! Then it must be someone else of whom I have heard and of whom I do indeed approve." He waved his handkerchief, hanging well over the rail.

Molly, the handsome planter beside her, waved back.

Day continued talking, his shock of russet hair flying to the wind. "As I was saying, Mr. Doit, Singapore is suffering from an absolute wedding epidemic. Yes, indeed, very infectious. Very. The first thing I do, the very first, is to run over to Hope Island to give a young couple there my blessing. Ah, you have heard of our famous Monte Cristo Island. Of course. Of course. The Hope Laboratory is in all the papers. I can assure you, my dear friend, that the mushroom growing propensities of any building in course of construction out East is truly amazing. I might say positively startling. A bare acre minus the solo bovine today and the roof on the garage to-morrow as it were." Sometime later, glowing with contentment and good fellowship, he gave the lawyer into the care of the Raffles Hôtel and allowed Molly to rush him to Latex Villa.

STRAWS.

"I can't get to the bottom of it." Grant filled his pipe, Janet put her knitting down.

"No more can we." Hicks, almost miraculously reformed, and immaculate in a dapper monkey-jacket, held the skein for his wife who, in the last six months, had discarded the aging title of Grannie for a more festive Auntie Ann.

"I'm utterly at a loss." Auntie Ann deftly passed the growing woollen sphere in and out of the skein. "Indeed, my dear David, we are all worried to death."

"They look as though they were frightened."

"Frightened!"

Janet looked at the lanterns blowing this way and that in a rising wind. "I think haunted a better word, John," she said.

"Haunted! Christine *haunted!*"

"No, that's not the right word, either." Hicks got up to disentangle two lanterns caught by the wind. "There's something ugly blowing up from the southwest. Day, you'd better get over to The Island whilst the going over that beastly ocean's good or you mayn't get across for a week." He pointed to a straw which came frolicking across the roof-garden. "When straws begin to lift in Singapore then it's time for the inhabitants to see to doors, windows, chimney-pots and hats."

"Don't Hickory, dear." Janet rang a hand-bell. "I remember a straw flying over this roof-garden twenty years ago. You do, too, John, don't you?"

"Rather. And I can still see that fat white cushion with feathers streaming from it come trundling over our heads, then a string of lanterns like a necklace on the spree, then all our magazines and things like a flight of flat, square geese."

"All straws before the storm."

"Here's Sunyi, dear. Anything blowing up, Sunyi?"

Sunyi pointed south-west to where the top of what looked like a huge, copper-coloured balloon came creeping over the horizon. "Trouble, sir, unless the wind changes and sweeps it right away." He looked at the dancing lanterns then across at Day. "Ombak, sir, is in port. He is starting back on the next tide which is at once almost. It would be wise, because of that monster on the offing, if you, sir, rode the tide back with him." He smiled, so happy was he with his new little wife. "I did not wait to ask, sir, I, myself, unpacked your meagre luggage. Your underwear is washed, ironed and stitched together in places. Your outer raiment pressed and the buttons still adhering strengthened whilst those now adorning the unseemly garments of some thieving 'dobi' washing fellow have been replaced by my wife, Ria, who has been promoted in your Excellency's absence to the post vacated by wives One and Two." He salaamed to Grant. "Likewise, sir, without waiting to ask permission of transfer I have transplanted to the Tuan Day's scant wardrobe such socks and such soft collars I thought you, sir, in friendliness, emergency and good charity might very well spare." He salaamed to Janet. "Also, Madam, I have made an unauthorised donation from the Guest Drawer of one

toothbrush because although the Lady Kris also keeps a well-stocked Drawer yet does the sight of a new toothbrush per se or to oneself and not as a loan make a good impression upon the gear unpacking domestic."

The glimmer, a flicker of a smile passed round the circle.

"I think Sunyi's right, Day."

"He is." Hicks disentangled the wool caught in his wife's old gold locket. "I haven't been round about here for over fifty years without having got a certain hang of the weather. If that beastly looking blob in the offing's not a budding typhoon then as a weather prophet I'm a washout."

Sunyi disentangled a string of lanterns and went away. Day sat, elbows on knees, eyes perturbed. "Now tell me why you used that dreadful word in connection with Christine. How can they look haunted? It is only conscience and fear, both one and the same thing, which haunt."

"Haunting's the wrong word, David. They look as though they had got into a world of their own. I don't quite know how to explain what I feel." Auntie Ann opened the old gold locket, as was her habit, looked at the photo there and closed the trinket with a snap. "To me they look as though they had got lost."

"Lost!"

"You are all wrong." Janet, so wise, so true, so content, looked from one to the other. "They give me the impression of two children who have strayed, quite by accident, into a place forbidden them. They seem to be

standing still, as though afraid of making a noise, of being —being—well, caught."

"Caught! Good heavens, Janet!"

Janet shook her head. "It's not exactly what I mean, David. I don't mean detected in something wrong. I mean —oh, I don't know how to explain what I do mean."

Grant lit a pipe. "The fact is, Day we're disappointed. We expected those two to be as happy as birds in a new nest and they're not. The Laboratory's fine. Old Professor Test's been over already from Calcutta to stake his claim, which is the best room in the building——"

"He and the others are moving in next month."

"He's already transplanted some of his poisons."

"What, with crowds of children on The Island?"

They laughed. Christine had the little poison chest stowed safely away in the strong room at the top of the east wing in the Bungalow and not only that, the Invisible Ray had already been installed so that a straying mouse let alone a stray child would set all the bells ringing and switch on all the lights.

THE MISTY CROWN.

Day got up. "I wish life could be as easily emptied of worry as a jug is of water. Oh, by the way, Hicks. Can you help?" He turned to the old fellow who sat swinging his hands from side to side to facilitate the winding. "On the boat coming over I met the junior partner of the well-known London firm of lawyers, Doit and Well—if you were to hold your fingers straighter the wool wouldn't

slip, you know—he's scouring this part of the East for a trace of a man who disappeared from the earth about fifty years ago."

"But the East's simply choked with that kind of lost and roving sheep, Day."

"I know, but this is different. This is a noble, a ducal sheep. Now wait, let me get it right." Day ran his hand over his thick hair. "Yes, Phillip, Orr, Broom, no, Birch——"

"Oh, you mean the Duke of Elmswood, the famous Tree family." Auntie Ann, well up in the peerage after the manner of her generation, stopped winding. "I was looking it up a little while ago. After the death of the young duke in Peking. You know, Molly's and Billy's friend on the boat out. The heir is a very, very distant cousin." She patted her thick grey hair as though she felt the fortune-teller's crown upon it. "I wonder if he is married? Fancy waking up one morning to find yourself the Duchess of Elmswood and crowned with strawberry leaves." She smiled. "What is he like, or what was he like? Remember I've been an exile for over half a century. Hickory, my dear, don't hold the skein so tight, you will break the wool."

The Duke of Elmswood slackened his hold on the skein. He also played a kind of cat's cradle with a stray strand or so, tangled the wool and bent his head very low indeed to get it straightened out, his fingers working slowly, his memory flashing like a shuttle up and down the years behind him.

He was the heir, the very, very distant cousin. There

had been more lives than he could count on the fingers of both hands between him and the dukedom. And now this. The War. A boating accident. A hunting accident. The last one gone owing to a faulty lung.

The Peerage.

The honour and the wealth balanced by the publicity and the worry. The castle, the great town house, moors and racing-stables against the pretty, white villa on the hill-side of Singapore. Great traditions, battles fought and won through the centuries. The Gallery filled with the portraits of famous men and such fair women. The name written from one end of history to the other.

And he?

A wobbling brand just snatched from the burning and barely steady on his feet.

And his wife?

The gentle woman who had found it in her heart to love him for over fifty years. Who, whilst despising him, rejecting him for an apparently chronic alcoholism, had been faithful to him for over half a century. The fortune-teller's misty crown? He could offer it her. He could interlace her bonny grey hair with strawberry leaves. But at her age? at his age? Surely better a dish of herbs and contentment therewith as the sun went down. If they discovered him? What a stir. Reporters. Click of camera. The excavation of the past with the ruins of the Bungalow, the Refereeship, the Village of The Bulls. What a record for a peer. What a scoop for the daily press.

And something else.

The famous Tree cellar.

The hoary vintages. The dim, dusty, delectable bottles. An outsize temptation to an alcoholic brand still singed from the burning. A daily and nightly battle to be waged under the steely, all-seeing eye of the stately Tree butler who would synchronise with the snaring bottles.

What if he lay doggo?

Then that honest-to-goodness fellow, Blake, removed still further in the n'nth degree, a country gentleman with a heavy family, a great knowledge of horseflesh and minus a vice, would come into what he would jubilantly believe to be his own.

Yes, truly better to plump for the dish of herbs seasoned with contentment than a crown of strawberry leaves plus the searching glare of limelight and the enslaving popping of corks.

"Doggo it is!" he whispered to the tangled skein of life.

"What, my dear? *what* did you say?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Ann, my dear." He looked up, smiled at the Duchess of Elmswood and put the tangled skein into her skilful hands. "I was merely addressing the ball." He looked across at Day and never a glint in the old blue eyes. "I may be able to rake up something out of the long ago, Day, but it's doubtful." He counted on his fingers. "Fair, blue eyes, medium height, hobbies nil, marks of identification nil, mannerisms nil. A slight alcoholic—ahem—claim due to over work but claim far from chronic—ahem—*far* from chronic." He got up. "I think we might safely say clues nil, also, what?" He smoothed her Grace's bonny grey hair, bent and kissed

her. "I'll just go down with Grant to see Day off, my dear, I won't be long."

BEFORE THE STORM.

Ombak shaded his eyes to the south-west where half a balloon, dark green, dark purple, slashed with orange at the edge, rested on the rim of the world to the southwest of Singapore. They ran with the tide, close to the mainland, a difficult task with the wind blowing in ugly puffs and breaking the tops of the sullen waves. "We make the harbour, Tuan, easily, but it will be a case of flying roofs and trees this night if I mistake me not. That monster upon the horizon has scared the birds. They have left The Point in flocks for the mainland. It is quite bare of birds. Also three big junks carrying precious timber to Singapura signalled one of the Sampan Fishing Fleet that they were thinking of turning back. They are out there, Tuan, ploughing the China Sea, that cursed mass of water. To my sailor's mind they would have done well had they turned at once and fled before the coming storm to the coast of Siam or even to Cambodia."

He brought the wheel over when the wind blew the boat slightly off her course.

"The Lady Kris and his Excellency Kris climbed to The Look Out at dawn to make sure The Beacon was in perfect working order also, yesterday, they visited the Caves of Safety, those deep natural caverns in the cliff side and in which all can shelter from the worst storm, the worst influx of water, with the least cumbersome of the household treasures, and the best of the beasts driven

into the two big caves kept for the cattle." He snapped his brown fingers. "Not only that. The Lady Kris has, this long time, invested a certain percentage of our earnings and whatever part of our savings we have liked to hand in, in a big foreign bank in Singapura. So that, even with house, cattle and treasure gone we could start again in life." He smiled. "Indeed some of the more frugal of us would be termed wealthy." He looked over his shoulder. "Note that flock of parakeet, Tuan. Being the fools they are the birds fly in a circle and that is a sure sign of coming wind, wind in abundance."

He looked down at Day who sat near the wheel.

"Tuan, I would like to speak in secret with you in this hour before the storm. This servant, so humble, of the Lady Kris, is troubled. Her many servants are troubled. We love her. We worship the ground she treads upon. We would, one and all, give our lives to help her. We are troubled because the light has gone from her eyes and the spring from her step. Also has a lack of laughter smitten the once joyous Island. Ria is no longer with her Mistress. She has gone to her husband, and Allah grant the child to be born to her is a man child. But the elderly woman who has taken her place says that the Lady Kris no longer laughs and therefore her servants are troubled." He touched his forehead, his lips, his heart. "If, Tuan, a man of deep wisdom, you could rectify the ill then, to commemorate our refound happiness, we will add yet another window of painted glass to the English mosque."

THE GHOST.

Troubled, David Day stopped at the top of the steps and looked back.

The balloon monster, immensely swollen, crept up the horizon. The wind soughed. The rubber gourds clattered faintly. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. As they had clattered twenty years ago. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. His heart heavy, the ugly word 'haunted' echoing in his mind he walked across The Island to the persistent, faint sound.

Clatter. Clatter. Clatter.

Why haunted? Why just that word? What ghosts walked The Island? Had they a secret? Something out of the past? Strong's past? Fear gripped his heart. No, not fear. A premonition all mixed up faintly with that something familiar in Strong. That shadow of something which so many had noticed. Familiar of what? Nonsense. The fellow had picked up some of Lowth's mannerisms.

Clatter. Clatter. Clatter.

Like a ghost coming up out of the past. Out of where? Nowhere. Or out of the typhoon? Did the secret lie in the heart of that hideous green and black monster on the horizon? It did. He knew it through his love for the Lady Kris. The monster threatened her, held trouble for her just as twenty years back it had held trouble for her people. He stopped for breath. The ghost was walking towards her from the heart of the typhoon of twenty years back. Not this monster. No, the typhoon of twenty years ago held the ghost which crept across The Island to the clattering of the gourds. His face was damp with fear

then his trouble dropped from him like a discarded black mantle.

A LACK OF LAUGHTER.

Strong beside her, Christine stood in the doorway, shading her eyes.

"Oh, Uncle David! Oh, Uncle David, you, at last!"

She came running. She put both arms about his neck and kissed him on both cheeks and if the laughter was a little sharp and her eyes overbright with unshed tears as she clung to him and as she walked back between the two men, they did not notice it because of the whipping wind.

It came in a sudden powerful gust, lifted Christine off her feet and cracked a tree across with a sharp sound of splintering wood. A gardener came running, coolies with him. A woman in a yellow sarong showed for a moment in the trees and was gone, to close everything against the coming storm. A mango tree cracked, split in half, its two sides swaying drunkenly this way and that.

"Run in, Chris. Take her in, Day."

"Come, too, Chris."

"In a minute, dear. That fallen tree must be tied or we shall have it blown against the house. And they must ring the church bell to let everyone know that weather's coming." He smiled at her. "Keep her indoors, Day. And, dear, let's have lots of those buttery cakes for tea." He went back to her in the doorway and the little padre wondered if any of the great lovers of the past had ever been so good to look at.

Dante and Beatrice. Paolo and Francesca——

Paolo and Francesca. The guilty Florentine lovers. Guilty. Day ruffled his hair. And Christine with haunted eyes. The dreadful word used by Janet Grant. Guilty of what? There were ghosts everywhere about. They——

A crash of glass. The sound of men shouting. Day watched the two. They were frightened for each other but their fear did not send them into each other's arms to which safe shelter fear sends those who care for each other.

"You mustn't go out, Chris." Christine spoke sharply and stood in Strong's way. "Supposing a tree fell on you? The old mangos come up like weeds in a storm like this."

"Supposing one fell on a coolie and I safe indoors, Chris?"

Day shivered. Haunted? The whole Island seemed ghost-ridden. Those words. Elinor and Robert Still had used those identical words twenty years ago. In that very room. In front of Bramly Lowth who had repeated them later to Day as a proof of Still's stern sense of what he considered to be his duty at no matter what cost. Distant lightning flashed. It lit the sombre land from which the sound of laughter had fled. The dark room. The two in the doorway stood out against it. One so fair. The other so dark. Day rubbed his eyes. There seemed a mist about them. A veil which hung between them and something he should remember. He looked about the room. Across to the north door. He nodded. Of course. There was the explanation. The coming storm, the lightning, the rising wind had all served to revive his memory.

He was standing in the same room of twenty years ago.

The furniture had been moved into the room behind the north door. The seaman's chest from the south-west corner. The battered old desk, the long-chair, the table with the check cloth and the iron candlestick. He felt an immense relief. Here, of course, was the explanation of the trouble on The Island. Christine had not quite rid herself of her longing for, her thoughts of her twin brother, a claim which her early lonely life had turned into an obsession. She had allowed it to enter her life. It had risen as a barrier between the two. A flimsy, psychic barrier which he must help remove by reasoning with her. As soon as possible. And that would be quite soon as Christine, since a child, had told her Uncle David everything. Of course. It was all most satisfactorily explained. She had flung up a psychic barrier which Strong, ignorant of this obsession, had not known how to tackle. What the girl really wanted was a thorough good shaking. As the house was being shaken. And would it not be prudent to turn the light off at the main? A fire started by a fuse was the last thing anyone would want to add to whatever was coming out of the south-west. He suggested it. "And I'd advise candles as the house is rocking too much for oil," he added.

"Candles, Uncle David?" Christine came back into the room. "I have only one candlestick, the old iron one with a handle."

"We'll stick the candles to the furniture with their own wax, dear," Strong spoke from the steps. "Let's have a

big illumination for those juicy, scrumptious buns." He smiled at Christine and ran down the steps.

In the garden, thunder rumbling, lightning slitting the huge balloon poised on the edge of the world. Strong looked back. Christine, so anxious, stood in the doorway. The wind blew the long full skirt to her white silk dress this way and that like a big white bell. Blew a strand of hair across her eyes. He could see the thin gold chain round her throat. The old silver cross would be above her heart so full of loving-kindness to mankind. She was so sweet, so grave behind the barrier which had risen between them like a wall, shutting laughter and close companionship out. Laughter seemed to have died out of The Island. Children no longer ran to dance about their Lady Kris. Women no longer ran to the door to invite her over the threshold. The coolies sang at their work, but as an accompaniment to their work. There was no heart, no lilt to their chanting.

Why?

The children peeped at him in all friendliness from behind door and wall. The women smiled when he passed. The men put heart and soul into their work for him in the North Cove. But he and Christine knew and the intuitive native knew that things were not as they once had been. Perhaps the little man of God would be able to lay his finger on the trouble. Priests had insight and Christine loved her godfather. If he stayed away long enough she might unburden herself to the little padre whose Nut Basket was filled to the brim with answers to difficult problems. He watched a string of coolies hurrying

to The Jacob Plantation. And another further south. The sound of hammering came from all sides. Men shouted orders, others replied and above it came the everlasting clattering of the rubber cups against the trees. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. Here to a puff of wind. Now there. Just like castanets. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. And the wind rising. A flock of screaming green birds were swept out to sea like a ragged green ribbon. A young rubber tree bent double, sprang back, bent and snapped at the root.

He laughed to lighten Christine's anxiety. "I'll be back in no time, dear. I only want to make sure the servants, the whole staff, are safe in the Safety Caves." He waved to her, she waved to him and there was nothing to tell them that, just as they were, they would never meet again.

THE VEIL.

She watched him go through the growing gloom. To the west the massing clouds blazed at the edge as the sun went down behind them. To the east, strips of black clouds, like long canoes caught in a gale, raced across the blue sky. The top of The Island seemed to swing as the wind blew the trees this way and that. The Tamer, that statue of joyous youth, showed white against the grove. The curtain covering The Falconer, untwined then wrapped it up again as though it wound a shroud. She pulled the cross up from her neck and stood twisting the gold chain round and round. Her Uncle David? would he understand? If she did not understand how could she expect him to? But veils were nothing to priests. They

saw through them as they saw into sad hearts and perturbed minds. She turned to him. "Come into my room, Uncle dear. The tea will be laid and we might begin if you are very hungry." But she did not pour out tea. She sat down at the old table, stretched her arms on the old check cloth, laid her head down on her arms and burst into tears.

Day pulled a chair up and put his arm about her. How many women had he not seen weeping, their heads on their arms. And men, too, for that matter. Ah, this world with its temptations and tribulations and the blue sky just behind the black clouds all the time. But this. His little Christine. The girl he had brought into the world in this very room. The bedroom furniture had been moved into the other half when the room had been divided into two. It was getting dark, too. He struck a match and lit the candle in the iron candlestick. His hand shook a little. Bramly Lowth looked at him out of the flame. Haunted? The whole place was haunted. It had been a day just like this when Bramly Lowth had sat waiting. At the table at which Christine sobbed. And the room, the living-room, had been lit by one guttering candle then. In the same iron candlestick. And listen. Out of the past the echo of spoken words whispering.

"I wonder what will have happened before the candle burns out?"

Christine spoke. Lowth had asked the same question. The twins had been born before the candle had burned out, Still hurt, the servant, Malaya, killed and The Island swept bare. What would have happened before this can-

dle flickered and went out. Would he have discovered the root of the trouble, of his godchild's tears? And why were Elinor Still and Bramly Lowth mixed up with it all in his mind? Why had he the impression that this room in which they sat had something to do with it? Also the seaman's chest, the long-chair and the battered old desk. He got up to fasten a curtain blown by a draught and sat down again, patting Christine's hand.

He listened whilst she talked and at the end of half an hour was more befogged than he had been at the beginning of the explanation. There had been no explanation. How could there be? The whole thing was inexplicable, elusive and a little more of it would see Christine a patient of Knowles, the mental specialist.

"The thing for you to do, my dear," he said at the end, "is to leave all this for a month or two. Leave the Malay. Go on a sea voyage all by yourself and have a jolly good time. See what change of scene, climate and companions will do. You have been out here all your life. You have been surrounded by the same scenery and the same people for the same length of time. Leave it all and go off on your own."

"Leave Chris?" Christine sat up. "But I couldn't." She clasped her hands. "I couldn't live without him. I never lived until I met him. He is more—he is—oh, none of you could possibly understand. I don't understand—I——" She stopped speaking when Strong called to her from outside. She went to the window, opened it and called to him. "Come in, dear. We're in here and tea's ready, waiting for you." She dried her eyes and smoothed her hair and

went to meet Strong at the door, so young, so sweet in her silver embroidered gown, the mosaic brooch pinned into the embroidery at the neck, the old cross shining on the old gold chain.

"I'll change first, dear." In his shirt sleeves, the sleeves rolled to the shoulder, Strong came running up the steps and into the room! "I'm not fit to have tea with the Lady Kris in her pretty white gown, am I, Day?" He laughed and stretched up to pull a short blind over the top of the window, the light on him, on his arms, on David Day who, white as death, sat staring.

"Well, don't be long, Chris. I want you to scold Uncle David. He dares suggest I want a holiday."

"A holiday. Why not, dear?"

"Oh, but all by myself."

"How do you mean, Chris? a holiday without *me?*"

"Yes, he wants me to leave you and go away on my own."

Strong turned to David Day. "Leave——" He stopped speaking to stare at Day who, speechless, white to the lips, leaned on the table pointing at him. "Why, Day, what on earth's the matter? Have you seen a ghost or what?"

Christine ran to Day and looked to where he pointed. "What is it, Uncle, dear? what can you see near Chris?" She clasped her hands. "I tell you this room is haunted. I've always, always said the place was haunted. It's full, it's packed with ghosts. I know Mother haunts this room. I know it. I've never seen her but I feel her near me always. Quite close to me. Whispering." Her voice rang

sharply, she shook Day by the arm. "What is it, Uncle, dear? what is it?"

"That mark? that cross on Strong's arm?"

THE REVELATION.

Christine laughed. The coming storm was affecting her Uncle, too. It was indeed time more candles were lit to dispel the growing gloom.

"That, Day? oh, that's something quite unique."

"It's no wonder Chris came half across the world to find me, Uncle dear." Christine twisted the silver cross round and round as she spoke. "We were marked out for each other from the beginning."

"Yes, would you believe it, Day? We have the same birth-mark. Exactly the same. Breadth, width, colour and shape." He held up his arm marked by the cross which Christine nervously twisted round and round. "Mine's here. You see? On my arm. Christine's is on her shoulder-blade. When she wears one of those frocks cut right down to the waist-belt behind you can see it if the shoulder-strap slips." They both laughed as Strong began to unroll his sleeves so as to pull them down.

THE DECISION.

Day stepped back into the shadows. So this was the explanation. The veil was no longer there. It had been torn away and from behind the shreds the face of Bramly Lowth, the childless man, looked at him out of the past.

Of course. Of course. The wind brought a little echoing sound. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. The tapping of the gourds in the wind. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. Christine's life, her happiness, her dreams in pieces at her feet. And out of the wind's moaning? Listen. The revelation of Elinor Still's words spoken after the mock funeral of her son.

" 'May God forgive me I did it for the best! May God forgive me I did it out of love.' "

Whispering. Whispering. In this very room and then again, when she lay dying.

" 'Tell Christine she has a——' "

And Elinor Still dead with the secret on her lips.

A dreadful, shameful secret which showed her one time great faith in her God nothing but a broken reed. She had allowed the storm to weaken her faith. She had not clung to the firm rock of her belief in God. Her world swept from under her feet, her lands laid bare, she had sold her firstborn for a price. To childless Lowth who had carried an empty coffin to the mango grove. A shameful bargain. One with The Sale of which the price had been thirty pieces of silver. Why had she done it? What could have been the power behind the appalling deed? Could it have been love? for the dour man she had loved with all her stout heart? She had said so. 'I did it out of love.' Her words. Of course. Lowth had stood by them through and after the storm. The famous surgeon. The nursing-home. And listen to the gourds chuckling. Then the legacy of five thousand pounds. That was it. Elinor Still had sold her son for five thousand pounds to Lowth, the childless millionaire.

Well might the wind laugh and the gourds chuckle.

How puzzled Singapore had been over Strong. How could it have been so blind? How could he have been so blind? As he stood there, rolling down his sleeves, Strong was the image of his mother. How often had he, Day, not seen her rolling down her sleeves after ridding her hands of dough or soapsuds. That strong woman to die with a falsehood on her lips. In her heart. Or had the abominable sale been something bigger? greater? Had it been a sublime sacrifice? How like her son was to her. The same strength verging on hardness in the face and eyes. The same, intensified, in Christine's.

Would they, too, be capable of some tremendous sacrifice?

They had the strength of heart, principle and spiritual conviction necessary to climb the heights to the bleak, bare, high ground where the strong made sacrifice. Both of them. He knew Christine. Grant had told him that Christopher Strong's trust in God was as firm as a rock. He did not fraternise easily and had been overheard to say that there might be grey between black and white but that there was no midway between right and wrong. What would he do when he knew? And Christine? what way would he find for her? They loved each other truly but one could so easily see, now, that their love for each other was the strong, unbreakable bond of the twin, of twinship, the one ego in two bodies.

And listen to the tempting, the whispering in the voice of the wind.

Must they be told?

No one but himself knew about the birthmark. The other two who had known, Lowth and the Malay servant, were dead. He had not given the birthmark a thought. Not once in the twenty years. Reserved Christine had never mentioned it. But he *did* know. He was the keeper of the secret and to him had been left the decision between right and wrong. Their lives, happiness and destiny were in his hands and he must decide quickly, at once, before the shirt-cuff fastened round Strong's wrist. God give him insight and help him fight the great temptation!

Just to let things stand. Just to let them be. There was no sin in taking an apple from a tree which was not forbidden or which man did not know had been forbidden. Sin came in breaking the commandment 'Thou shalt not.' He was the keeper of the secret. He knew and if he kept silent he would be as sinful as one who deliberately stole from the forbidden tree. But what if he shouldered the guilt? Made himself responsible for it? For Christine's sake, for her happiness? What if he kept silent? No one would ever know and in time the barrier between them, thrown up, unknown to them, by their relationship, would grow higher, stronger, until it divided them completely, forever. He prayed for help. He clenched his hands until the knuckles showed white in the candlelight and prayed as Christine helped unroll the sleeve. His prayer must be answered, he would have to decide before the cuff was fastened.

His prayer was answered. As the single bell began to toll, calling all to safety, the draught, which guttered the candle, blew the communicating door open and slammed it

to again but not so quickly he had not caught sight of the cradle with its muslin tied with faded blue-satin ribbon. There was no doubt left in his mind. However much Christine suffered she would have to bear it for the sake of mankind. He had not thought of that. He had not given a thought to *that*. He prayed for guidance and having prayed came out of the shadows, walked over to them and taking Christine by the right hand and Strong by the left, separated them and stood between them.

"Why, Uncle David?"

And when he had finished speaking there was no other sound than the clatter of the gourds in the rising wind and the church bell tolling.

"I will come when you send for me." Day turned at the door. "I shall be in my room, waiting. Yes, I promise, I give you my word I will wait until you send for me." He closed the door softly, signed it with the sign of the cross and went up the stairs to the clatter, clatter, clatter of the gourds and in the faint light of The Beacon burning to help those out in the storm.

THE BEACON.

The bell clanged sharply, insistently, calling to safety. Men carried infants. Women the greatest household treasure. Elder children aided smaller. Chinese helped Malay and Malay Indian. Differences were forgotten as they ran before the menace of the typhoon.

Flat on his face on the edge of the cliff Ombak shaded his eyes. The beast would pass far out to sea but the

outer edge would sweep The Island. A flash of lightning showed the mainland. The mountains. Tiger Stream a streak of silver. The white foreshore. A blinding flash of lightning cracked from east to west. Thunder sounded very far away. From the China Sea came a deep booming as though a giant hammer smote without ceasing upon a giant gong. "It passes up the middle of the Ocean. It will either churn the Gulf into a seething cauldron or die on Cambodia's shore." He shook his head when the wind lifted the roof from a tool-house and carried it like a sheet of red paper out to sea. He fought his way down to the deserted Fishing Village. A flash of lightning showed the mountain-high, white-capped waves. He could hear the monster's dreadful booming. " 'Tis far out yet I fear The Island will be stripped bare as it was stripped twenty years ago when our Lady Kris and her twin brother were born into this troublesome world." He touched a charm at his neck, praying for the safety of the beloved Lady Kris, and fought against the wind to reach the Safety Caves whilst Christine and her brother sat at the table.

They sat at the old table, one on each side of it, their hands clasped across the old check cloth, the candle, half burned, guttering down one side.

"I wonder what will have happened before the candle burns right out?"

Christine whispered, like a ghost from the past speaking, her eyes shadowed with The Beacon's light, a red flag of danger blown across the window now and then by the wind.

"Come over to the long-chair, Chris." Strong went to

her, touched her hair so gently. "Before the candle burns out, dear, we will have everything arranged."

So simple a plan.

A tale of misunderstanding for the benefit of the world. A quick divorce, a matter of a day's wonder, if that, and then, far away, in some remote corner of the world, they would meet again. Under other names. To live as brother and sister to the end. As they should have been together from the beginning. Always. From childhood. "Chris, dear, to think that you and I are really one. That the unrest of this life, these last months, will drop from us just as a dream is forgotten. And that we shall live together forever. At peace. Without remorse for what has been because we have knowingly done no wrong. Because in our life together we were innocent of all wrongdoing." He took her hands. "You will make a gift of The Island and the Laboratory to the City. As a memorial to our people, our mother and father but especially to our mother." He looked about the room. "A fitting gift, Chris." He smiled at the simple name and touched her cheek. "Poor Mother, to think she made that sacrifice for love. Sold her first-born because she so loved the man who was down and out, broken and maimed." He pointed to the old desk. "That pen means that something dreadful, vital, was written in this room." He put his arm round her and lightly kissed her cheek. "What a supreme sacrifice. How much she must have loved to have sold her son."

He stroked her hair back from her stricken face.

"Now hush, dear, hush. It's all over. The dream in

which our sweet and simple love rebelled against its travesty is over. It is something to be forgotten. Nothing else. It is something which has never been because it was untrue."

They would not see each other for six months. She must go to some cool country to bring the colour back again. He touched her tear-drenched cheeks. He would get a place ready. Canada he thought, if she would like it, on the frontier where there would be riding and all that kind of thing for them both and where they would live, brother and sister, until the time came for them to go on together. He bent to catch Christine's whisper.

"Oh, but, dear, there is no sin."

Sin was knowing. Had they stayed together for one single hour after they had been told then out of the dreadful mistake they would have made a deadly sin. If they allowed any part of it to become known, if harm to others could actually grow out of it, then, if they did not try to wipe the matter out, stamp it out as they would stamp out a spreading fire, they would not only be conniving at a deadly sin, they would be committing one.

He drew her back a little, held her closer when she shivered, smiled at her and dried her tears. "I can't hear, dear. What did you say?" He bent his head to listen, lifted her face by the chin and stared at her, eyes full of horror. Pulled her upright and held her face to the light.

"My God!"

"And out of your mouth the sentence, Chris, out of your own mouth."

She sprang to her feet, facing him, the light of The Beacon flashing red behind her, put out her hands as though to hold him away and ran backwards to the table where the one candle guttered. She leaned with her hands on the table, staring at him, the light on her face, the silver cross swinging to and fro, to and fro. It was as though the strong, fair mother and the dark, resolute father stood there on each side of the table.

The wind shook the house. A hideous booming came from the east where the typhoon swept upon its devastating path. A wave swept the harbour, piled the Sampan Fishing Fleet into a heap, one boat on the other, flung them onto the rocks, pulled them back and pounded them to bits. The fishermen covered their ears. Ombak clutched a charm at his neck. The crews of three great Chinese junks, sighting The Beacon through the driving clouds, strove to turn, calling upon The Dragon God to save them. One made it and fled before the horror, the other two, to the screaming of their crews, crashed into each other, long oars locking.

[1] Round they went and round, dipping and curtseying. The seas swept them. A mast cracked, broke and fell, binding them closer. Round and round they went, foundered and sank.

The sharp, insistent clattering of the gourds sounded like hail upon a roof. It linked one peal of thunder to another, rose and fell with the moaning of the wind, threaded in and out of Strong's words as he strove with Christine.

[1] Witnessed by the writer on the Upper Yangtze.

To Christine it seemed as though her mother sat there, knitting, on the long-chair flung, afterwards, into the attic corner with the cradle, the work-basket, the seaman's chest. Knitting and watching her over the needles. Clatter. Clatter. Clatter. As thin and fine a sound as that of knitting needles. As sharp and persistent as a hammer on a long lid.

Strong leaned across the table and took her hands. She pulled them away. Not in anger but because she was afraid. She covered her eyes to shut her brother out. Her twin, part of her, one with her. How great the temptation. Life was so rounded, so sweet all in an hour. Love tempted her. Love for her twin. Just as love had tempted her mother.

"No one will ever know, dear." Strong whispered. "I will guard you safely through the months to come and afterwards no one will ever, ever know."

"No one knows," whispered Temptation.

"No one need ever know," whispered Love.

She went to the window and looked up. To where The Beacon flared. The wind blew the flames, curled them together, straightened them, broke them this way and that. They wrote letters of fire across the sky. They fashioned a Wise Saying in her mind. One her Uncle Olly had been fond of quoting.

'It is wise to fell the hollow tree for fear a branch should snap and fall upon the innocent child sitting in the shade thereof.'

She could hear his deep voice now, the words in and out of the never ceasing clattering of the gourds.

She began to speak, her face to the window-pane. She turned when Strong cried out, and stood there against the red light as martyrs once stood against the stake. Strong put his hands to his ears. He would not listen. Such a way out could never be. Never. She went to him, pulled his hands away and held them down upon her heart.

"Had it been just you and I, dear, I think God would have let us carry out your plan. But it is not just you and I. There is the third." She hid her distressed eyes against his shoulder. "There is the other to be born. To us." She looked up, her eyes so brave. "The harm, dear, so unknowingly brought about through us, would not stop with us or with the next sad generation." She stood away from him, her hands in his. "It might go on and on and who could tell what frightful hurt it might not do in the world. Even when we—we three—were dead." She took his face in her gentle hands and smiled. "And what is it, dear? nothing but a passing through a door. And do you think a God of Love would be anything but very kind to me?"

"No! no! no!"

The sound of the shouted words reached Day who prayed on his knees in a shadowed room. He got up, listened, opened the door and looked out. The house was dark except for the glare of The Beacon when the wind blew the flames down. The red light splashed through this window, through that, turned the waters of the fountain red then left them, silvery white.

"No!"

Strong's voice came from near the door. The church bell tolled as the tower swayed to the raging wind. Day leaned over the rail, ran down to the landing and ran back again as the door below opened wide. He clasped his hands. It was just as though time had rolled back twenty years, to the moment when he had stood in the same doorway to speak to Lowth. Had he only known. Had he only known then. He looked over the banisters. Strong stood there, his arms across the doorway. The light of the candle made a halo to Christine's head. She was speaking. Passionately. Insistently, her words lost in the storm.

A dreadful storm. The clattering of the gourds had stopped. There was no more sound from the plantations. The trees, broken, uprooted, lay piled upon each other where the wind had flung them. Tool-houses had gone. The fruit-groves showed jagged stumps sticking up through the earth where the trees had snapped off at the root. The wind brought the sound of bellowing and stamping from The Safety Caves into which the cattle had been driven. Of goats and poultry there was nothing left except what the women had taken into the caves with them.

It seemed to Day as he looked over the banisters that he had fallen asleep in the midst of the storm twenty years back and having dreamed the twenty intervening years had wakened in the middle of the same storm. The Beacon alone told him that he had not wakened from sleep. There had been no beacon twenty years ago, when the great junk had foundered off the east coast.

At a crash of thunder followed by a searing, spitting

flash of lightning, Strong looked over his shoulder. Christine bent under his arm and ran up the stairs.

"Come back to me, Christine. Come back to me!"

She stopped on the landing and looked down. "I am coming back to you, dear," she said and ran up the stairs, holding up her gown.

Day tip-toed to the banisters and looked over. Strong, bewildered, stood looking up, face white as death in the gloom lit by the lightning. He came to the first step and stood there, waiting. He walked up the stairs slowly and waited on the first landing. Walked down again and stood looking up. "Why did she go upstairs? what has she gone to get?" He spoke to himself, out loud and Day wondered at the look of fear upon the white face.

Then Christine came running down, her hand upon her throat, her eyes shining. She stopped at the door just open a crack and touched it. "Remember that I love you, Uncle David, darling," she whispered, "and thank you, dear, so much." She kissed the wood lightly and ran downstairs holding up her gown, put her hand in Strong's and walked with him to the Inner Door, the tapping of her high heels lost in the raging of the storm. Her long skirts made a little brushing sound but her brother could only hear her voice and see the light in her eyes when she put both arms about his neck, talking very gently.

THE HIGH GROUND.

"——and when I am dead, dear, with our secret, you must take me out into the storm and lay me down on high

ground were the wind will find me and carry me out to sea. There must be no trace of me left. There must be no talk about me, about us." She drew her hand across her eyes and shook her head when the candle suddenly went out, leaving the room quite dark, then flamed again, so tall, so bright. "There is—there is a way—of expiation for you—Chris—to wipe away—all stain upon—our name—the Church—dear—until——" She swayed a little, frowned when a small phial fell from her hand and smiled when he drew her back against his shoulder, his cheek against hers, talking to her, quickly, clearly, because she was so near to death.

"There is no expiation to make, dear. We have not sinned because we were innocent of what we did, and what we have done so unknowingly has dropped from us like an ill-fitting cloak." She slipped a little in his arms and when he gathered her up and sat down with her on the long-chair, smiled and kissed his cheek. "And do you remember what I said that first night we met, when we sat in the old living-room, talking." He bent to catch her difficult whispering. "Yes, I said that there might be grey between black and white but there was no midway between right and wrong. I said, too, that I could not enter the Church because I had it in me to love. I spoke about love when I really meant the dormant bond of the twin which bound me to you then, which has always bound me to you. Something so rare, so delicate, so far above just ordinary love." He slipped the gold ring off her finger, crossed her hands upon her breast and put the silver cross between them. "I could never enter the Church, Christine,

because I could never give my heart and mind to God. Alive or dead you are a part of me, my twin, one with me." He bent to catch the faintest whispering, touched her face so white in the dim room. "No, dear, we have not sinned but I should commit a grievous sin were I to take vows without my whole heart and mind being dedicated to God." He bent down to catch the barely whispered words. "My work? For others. My work here? Dedicate my life to the sick as an atonement?" He looked down at her and sighed and smiled, twisting a curl round the pearl in her ear. "Do you remember what I said about you, dear, that first night when we talked together. That I was sure there was the same streak of fanatic strength in you as there was in me. And perhaps intensified in you because a woman of great personality was usually stronger than any man. And that is so, Chris. Where you lead, I follow." He smiled when her eyes opened wide and held her searching hands. "You are dying, Christine, because you are sure that the life which has come to you can only end in wrong, in sin. I shall follow you, I shall die with you because I cannot live without you. You are my heart, my soul, you have been with me from the very beginning." He raised her head a little and sat with his cheek against hers. "Life is sweet, so very sweet, Chris, now that I know we are twins. Born in the same hour. Bound to each other." He shook his head when she spoke to him and so clearly because Death beckoned her from behind the flickering candle.

"I think—I think I am afraid, Chris," was what she said.

He laughed, his heart breaking, held her close in his arms and rocked her gently, as he might have soothed a frightened child. "But you mustn't be afraid, dear, because I am coming, too. When you have opened The Door through which you will have to pass, and I, you must wait there for me to overtake you. We will go together to the Judgment Seat so that the God of our fathers Who made us one in two bodies will know that having made us like that it is impossible for one to stay behind the other." He kissed her closed eyes, kissed her cheek. "Your wonderful courage will open The Door for you, dear, but I shall follow because I am not strong enough to live alone, without you." He bent to kiss her as the candle flickered and hearing the faint whisper, bent closer, smiled down at her and stroked her hair so tenderly. "How sweet you are, Christine. At the Judgment Seat you will beg, upon your knees, that we are not separated for all eternity just because I have not got the strength to live without you. Because I must follow you. Up to the high ground of sacrifice." She smiled when a tear splashed upon her face and whispered to him. She would wait for him and there was no pain. It was just like falling asleep. She lay quite still, looking to one side of the candle, at someone standing there.

"Mother, Chris—we didn't know—and—God will forgive." She laughed so sweetly. "You see He—*He* made us —twins."

Strong put his hand upon her heart then held up the cross. "Open your eyes and look up, Christine." His voice rang through the room. Her long lashes lay like a shadow

on her cheeks. "Open your eyes, sister dear, and look up."

Christine opened her eyes.

A cross stretched from earth to heaven and on it Love hung crucified. Could she lift Love down? She would like to try. To bind Love's many wounds. She raised herself in her brother's arms and rested that way, against his shoulder, then looked up at him. He was a part of her. One with her. They would never be separated again. Because he was her twin he would follow her.

"I will wait for you, Chris," she whispered and touched his hair so gently. "I love you, dear," and smiled at him and died as the candle flickered and went out.

LOVE CRUCIFIED.

He sat with her in his arms, rocking her, to and fro, to and fro, on the long-chair on which their mother had sat wrapped in the old shawl and tempted of the devil. Motherhood had been crucified that night of storm. Love this night when the lightning showed the silver cross on Christine's heart.

And listen to the voice in the wind. The voice of the tempter.

Whispering. Tempting.

Life was so sweet. Success so sure. The world at his feet. Why end life? Why throw success away? No one would ever know. The little padre knew nothing of the small, black phial there on the floor near Christine's high-heeled slipper. An accident due to the storm. Ah, the whispering. The tempting. That would explain everything.

The other secret, the birthmark in the shape of a cross, would be locked away with the rest of the heartbreak in the well of the Nut Basket.

Whisper. Whisper. Whisper.

The voice of the tempter came out of the storm, out of the shadows of twenty years ago. Strong lifted his head as The Beacon flashed. He laughed. A strange sound in the tragic room, his eyes like cold, grey steel in the lightning. He laughed at temptation. He did not want to live. He did not want success. Christine, his twin, lay dead in his arms. Nor did he want to move. It was just as though the tide of life, his life, ran out. As though it slowly ebbed. His heart seemed to miss a beat now and then. He could feel it throbbing against the beautiful Lady Kris who, dead in his arms, explained the slow ebbing of his life, the uncertain beating of his heart.

THE BOND.

She was his other half and she lay so still, so safely sheltered on his heart. How alive she looked in The Beacon's glow, how dead in the lightning. He would like to twist the little curl round the pearl in her ear but he could not because his hands were numb. Just as though they were dead, as though life had already left his fingertips.

Suggestion whispering that he could not go on living now that his twin, his other half, lay dead.

Life?

He laughed and threw it away.

He would sit there until the dead feeling spread from

his fingertips to his heart and stopped it beating. Until, he, too, died. No man could live with half a life, for years with half a soul and his thoughts forever with his dead twin. He touched Christine's lashes, stroked her hair and arranged the embroidery fastened at the throat with the mosaic brooch. He looked up, into the shadows and frowned at the mind-shadow of his mother standing there behind the table, the old shawl fastened with the mosaic brooch once bought in Italy.

Because of her, their mother, the Lady Kris lay dead.

Their mother, for all her hard religion and cast-iron principle had succumbed to temptation. She had not had the spiritual strength with which to pronounce the words 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' Magic words which drew the sting from death and the power from all sin. He shook his head and smiled and traced the smile on Christine's mouth with a very gentle finger. If their mother had not resisted temptation she had possessed that mighty love for which all is forgiven. As they two, he and his sister, would be forgiven.

Because of the bond between them, the love of one twin for the other. Something far deeper, stronger, and abiding than the love of lovers or the love of man and wife. It drew him after her. Up to the high ground of sacrifice. He bent to pick up the small, black phial, the key to The Door through which she had just passed, and stayed that way a while, his cheek against hers.

But she did not open her eyes and smile at him because she was dead.

He held her close when thunder crashed above the roof

and the wind blew the light of The Beacon down. Orange, red and dun its banners flamed to the four points, a signal, a warning. Up there. On high ground. A pillar of fire by night, a splendid pyre, glowing and burning until the dawn.

'Lay me down on high ground.'

He got up, Christine's voice echoing, and crossed to the window where he stood watching, holding her in his arms. Planning their last secret resting place. Up there where the glowing embers, the flames, the soft, grey ash would cover them, enwrap them and keep them and their secret forever safe. He watched a while. The wind blew the flames towards the north, towards the east and up as though it would entangle them in the racing clouds.

It would be so quiet up there, so safe.

He carried her out through the window and across the crazy pavement. The clump of old mangos, lifted like straws in the wind, had been blown out to sea. The mock grave flattened to the ground, the headstone, his name scratched upon it, blown whither. The Boyhood statues lay broken where they had fallen. The single bell tolled as the belfry rocked in the storm.

Tolled the gentle passing of the Lady Kris.

Her white skirt caught in this uprooted tree. In that. It tore a little, leaving a shred of silk impaled upon a thorn. So steep and narrow the way to where The Beacon flared to help those in the storm. Trees, uprooted, were piled upon each other. The pounding of the breakers came up from the rocks below. There was drifting spray. Chris-

tine's face so white in the lightning and the booming of the dying typhoon like drums in a slow procession.

He climbed very slowly, looking back now and then. The Island was stripped bare, the house, where David Day knelt in a shadowed room, saved by the lessening wind. The buildings in the North Cove had slipped into the sea. The servants, the men, women and children who had so loved their Lady Kris, were safe. Steeped in superstition they would flee the tragic place at dawn.

Fear would keep Hope Island forever free from prying eyes and pilfering hand.

No one would climb to The Look Out again.

No one would ever guess.

A trailing branch caught in the embroidery and pulled it. The mosaic brooch fell. He did not stop. He held his sister close and carried her up to where the flames leapt towards the north, towards the south and up to the racing clouds. He watched the baskets coming up the line, tip, empty and slide back again. The twentieth would mark the years since they two had been born upon this island washed by the China Sea. And David Day? The little man of God there in the house alone? Would he guess? Perhaps and, approving, would shut the secret of the sacrifice safely away in his steadfast heart, in the well of his Nut Basket.

The logs fell so gently upon the glowing embers. The powdered ash lay thick. The flames would make a radiant canopy under which to close the eyes in the last sleep. He bent and kissed her hair. There was no need to hurry. They were quite alone. The taste was bitter-sweet, like life, the phial made a little splintering sound when it fell

and broke, the wind swept the shreds of glass together and scattered them in the sea.

How gentle the oncoming of the last sleep.

"You smile, Christine." Signing her, signing himself with the silver cross he slipped it back into her hands as death very gently touched his eyes. "I am quite near you, dear. I will—I will hold you so close." He carried her down the iron stairs carpeted with fire. Twisted the little curl round the pearl in her ear. Bent and kissed her hands. "Death will bind us—closer still—Christine—no one will ever find—us—now—my—beloved sister."

He laid her down upon the pyre built by the strength of their convictions. The flames spread above him. He smiled and watched them, all orange, red and gold, wrap the Lady Kris so softly about, then went down to her, took her in his arms, sheltered her sweet face upon his heart and died.

SUNSET.

The sky a roof, the mosaic brooch and a shred of silk upon the altar before him, the secret of The High Ground shut forever in his steadfast heart, David Day, the little man of God, closing the lid upon the well of his Nut Basket, bowed his head and wept as the sun went down.